Help Me Hate You

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/34487572.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Categories:	M/M, F/F
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham & Beverly Katz, Will Graham & Abigail Hobbs, Abigail Hobbs & Hannibal Lecter, Molly Graham/Beverly Katz
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Mischa Lecter, Beverly Katz, Abigail Hobbs, Alana Bloom, Matthew Brown (Hannibal), Tobias Budge, Dr. Frederick Chilton, Jack Crawford, Molly Graham, Mason Verger
Additional Tags:	Magical Realism, Mind Palace, Season 2 Canon Divergence, violence primarily in the form of reliving someone else's memories, Minor Character Death, Hannibal Lecter is a Cannibal, Will Graham Knows, if you can't tell I'm a BIG fan of Hannibal getting beat up, frequent sprinkling in of canon dialogue adjusted to fit the story, but only in certain scenes pulled directly from canon which doesn't happen often, Cannibalism, but that's inevitable really, Slow Burn, wasnt expecting to hit a word count high enough for that but. here we are, Autistic Will Graham, and it's not as obvious but i love some good old fashioned projection so, Autistic Hannibal Lecter, Situational Mutism, Infidelity, its a one time event off screen but it happens
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Conjoined
Stats:	Published: 2021-10-14 Completed: 2022-04-23 Words: 82,117 Chapters: 20/20

Help Me Hate You

by Imanerdandliketoread

Summary

Will realizes that the Chesapeake Ripper, Doctor Hannibal Lecter, is a cannibal. That night, he falls asleep only to wake up on the steps of a massive chapel. Wandering inside, he stumbles upon a skull, engraved into the floor. As he wanders, he finds a door that leads him to a different location.
Over time, he realizes it isn't just a dream; Will has somehow transported himself into Hannibal Lecter's mind.
Will doesn't know why he's here or how he keeps returning, night after night with no reprieve, but he uses this opportunity to explore the internal machinations of his closest friend-turned-reviled-enemy. At first, Will assumes the most shocking thing he'd find would be the long-abandoned corridors of Hannibal's youth, but when he wanders too far he ends up discovering even something more devastating.
Hannibal Lecter, the Chesapeake Ripper and the one who framed him as the Copycat, is madly in love with him.

Notes

I have the first 6 chapters of this completed so I'm gonna try to stick to a routine of posting at least one chapter every week. This is the (assumed, idk the exact date) one-year anniversary (October 13th, I know it's getting late don't mind me) of the first time I watched Hannibal! Because of this, I'll post the first two chapters today
The title is from Help Me Hate You by Four Eyes, the entire song I think is pretty applicable to Hannigram
Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Into the Unknown

“If Hannibal’s the Ripper, what’s he doing with his trophies?” Beverly asks, voicing the question that’s haunted Will for weeks.

Then, he remembers. Remembers Cassie Boyle’s body suspended on a severed stag’s head, remembers how her lungs were surgically removed from her body while she was alive. He hears Hannibal’s voice, “I’m very careful about what I put in my body,” and he *knows*.

“He’s eating them.” Will wonders passively how many people he himself ate, how much evidence he helped Hannibal Lecter dispose of simply by being seated at his dinner table.

That night, Will struggles to fall asleep. He’s plagued by thoughts of how *good* Hannibal’s cooking tasted the few times he dined with the man. *The monster*, Will tells himself. That’s who he knew. Not a friend who would offer to make Will dinner, a killer strategically getting rid of evidence while simultaneously fulfilling the twisted desire to trick the people closest to him into eating other people. The man who ruined his life, not to protect himself but out of curiosity to see what Will would do.

He’s angry that he has to remind himself to be angry about the unwitting acts of cannibalism Hannibal forced upon dozens, if not hundreds, of people. He’s mostly mad about how little he actually meant to Hannibal, so he fuels that by connecting the cannibalism to it. To Hannibal, Will was just another person to deceive, to play with while bored. To get a sick thrill from unknowing acts of the unthinkable. Finally, his thoughts slow and the weight of sleep overwhelms him.

Will opens his eyes. He is intimately aware of the fact that he is dreaming, an unusual occurrence after months of not being able to tell hallucination from reality from dream.

He stands in the center of what is obviously a chapel, ornate and sprawling in the way only really seen in European chapels that are centuries older than America. Massive arches extend down from the ceiling and columns delineate where the pews are positioned. On the floor in front of him, the upper torso of a skeleton is engraved, its hands clasped in prayer.

He’s never seen this place before. He would know if he had. He wanders, passing the final row of pews to explore one side of the room. Candles are set out, to be lit in memorial of lost loved ones. Several are lit, and as he reaches for a stick to light one for Abigail, he hears Hannibal’s voice whisper in the wind. “*This place is my mind palace, a mnemonic system in which I use physical representations of my memories to organize them, keep them intact for reminiscing.”*

Hannibal has never spoken these words to him, but he hears them as if he’s right next to him. He turns around, shocked to see Hannibal sitting in a chair across from a blonde woman, two cushioned chairs positioned above the skull on the floor.

Doctor Du Maurier blinks, slow like she’s hesitant to take her eyes off Hannibal for even the briefest moment. “And do you hide there often? Might you one day find yourself spending

more time in there than out here?"

Hannibal hums, shifting one leg over the other. "It is not likely, though I do find myself getting lost in newer memories more often than others, as of late."

"Because of Will Graham? How much of your mind palace consists of him?"

Hannibal only smiles.

Seeming to acknowledge the fact that she has overstepped, Bedelia takes the time to glance at the dainty gold watch on her wrist, checking the time. "Our time is up for the week, Hannibal. Remember, all good things are best received in moderation."

The two, as well as their chairs, start to dissolve in front of Will's eyes, like grains of sand. What the *hell* was that? It felt like a memory or an introduction. An explanation for why he is standing in the room he is, but that makes no sense. How would he be able to witness memories of scenarios he had never been told about? Will's empathy was strong, but it wasn't magic.

Memory palace, could it be that his mind had cobbled together a therapy session between Bedelia Du Maurier and Hannibal, featuring things he knew Hannibal was interested in? Architecture, grandiosity, unreasonably complex methods of thinking, all of it was in line with what he knew about the man, even the newly exposed version of the person he had thought he was acquainted with.

He stands in the chapel pondering his situation for a while before he notices the edges of his vision going fuzzy and dark like he's about to faint. Slowly, the darkness encompasses everything and he sinks back into a light sleep.

He wakes up and he's back in the BSHCI. He faintly wishes he were back in whatever weird dreamland he had left just moments before.

All that was lost is revealed

Chapter Summary

> Will finds some memories from Hannibal's childhood and continues to wonder what the hell is going on. AKA, introducing Lady Murasaki and Mischa

Chapter Notes

> Chapter title (and the last one too) are references to Over The Garden Wall >:3 love that funky little show
> Most of the past stuff is based on a combination of headcanons and what I saw of Hannibal Rising before it disappeared off of Hulu so it does not stick to Hannibal's real backstory all the time

See the end of the chapter for more notes

That night, Will lays down hoping to slip into a dreamless state. He fades back into consciousness only to open his eyes and be greeted with the sight of the chapel once more. He sighs, confused as to why his brain has decided to stick him in this place two nights in a row.

He explores the rest of the room, taking note of a stairwell that ends in a door, likely connected to the chapel's basement or catacombs. Time doesn't seem to pass here, the light from the stained glass windows shining through at the same angle despite what feels like hours having passed with him wandering the room. It is always on the precipice of sundown.

He is distantly aware of his body deep in sleep and the shadows the crept in as he woke up aren't present. He'll likely be here a while still and the main room of the chapel is getting boring to stay in, as beautiful as it is.

Will descends the stairs, the hollow thud of his work boots—not the velcro slippers the BSHCI supplies—echoing with every step. He finally gets a good look at the door, its face carved with intricate depictions of holy scenes. It's beautiful, like the rest of the room. Will hates it, hates the lavishness of it all, the unrepentant ceremonialism. It reminds him of Hannibal.

He throws open the door. Light floods the hallway, banishing the shadows created by the low sun. The room in front of him is surprisingly bright, with large windows reaching from floor to ceiling and spanning a whole wall. A piano sits in the middle of the room and bookshelves filled to bursting line the wall farthest from the door.

Will walks up to the piano, noting as he gets closer that it's much different from that of the typical piano. He hits a key and it lets out a twangier sound than expected, reminiscent of the concertos of old. Harpsichord, then.

As he pulls his hand back from the key, another set of hands reaches for the keys. Will flinches away, sharply turning to face the newcomer.

A young man sits on the bench, with light brown hair streaked with gold like he spends a lot of time outdoors. He is dressed lightly, a pale brown shirt unbuttoned at the top and sleeves rolled up. His pants are dusty at the ends like he just returned from an open market or a stroll in the woods. His cheekbones are sharp, highlighted by the shadows they create across his cheeks as the sun reaches to light up his brown eyes.

He knows he's looking at a younger Hannibal, wonders if his imagination is so active that it managed to de-age a man he's never seen a photo of where he is under the age of 35. He supposes it isn't impossible, but frustration bubbles in his throat as a shout yearning to be released. *Why does he keep dreaming about Hannibal?*

While he was distracted, the younger Hannibal had begun playing. It started slow, its minor chord adding a natural sadness before slowly picking up in pace. At its peak, the piece was light and hopeful, Hannibal's fingers dancing over the keys.

Hannibal freezes. "Murasaki. It's not done yet, you'll ruin the surprise."

Will whips around, finally noticing the intruder. She stands half a foot shorter than Will, dressed in a silk robe. Despite the casualness of her attire, her posture and beauty draw attention to her and radiate an aura of calm power, like minor royalty.

"I didn't mean to intrude. Hannibal, they found another body. You must not be so reckless, what will happen to us if you get caught?" She is calm but Will notes the distance she keeps between herself and Hannibal, the sweat gathering on her palms. She is afraid of Hannibal, or at least wary of his potential.

Hannibal grins brightly. "Simple, my dear. I won't get caught. We've lived here several months already, but they haven't gotten close." At Murasaki's raised brow he continues, "I promise if there is even a hint of evidence that might lead them in our direction I'll have us on the next train out of the country. I will not leave you alone."

She considers this for a moment, the silence deafening. "What if it is best if I am alone? Your passion fuels your violence; I can't be another muse for you."

All emotion on Hannibal's face fades. "You mean to abandon me? To expect me to abandon my plans for the sake of your comfort?"

"I do. I think it best we go our separate ways. I will not stop you, but I can't on good conscience watch as you keep this up. I am sorry, Hannibal." She turns and leaves through the same door Will entered through.

He watches as Hannibal sits in silence for a moment, absorbing what Murasaki said. His hand darts out to grab his sheet music, standing quickly enough to knock over his stool. Will flinches as Hannibal throws his papers into the fireplace in the wall, grabbing the poker and slamming it down into the body of the harpsichord again and again.

Will is startled by the blatant show of emotion, more puzzled as Hannibal steps back only to slump to the floor. The image of Hannibal's shoulders shaking with his sobs remains in Will's head even as the real thing dissolves in front of him.

Before Will can accidentally summon another of… whatever he's seeing, he rushes to the only other door in the room. By now, Will is certain it will lead to a completely unrelated room and he sighs in relief when the sight of completely different architecture seems to prove him right.

He stands at the beginning of a long and decrepit hallway, paint peeling from the walls and plaster crumbling from the ceiling in places. Some doors seem to be in slightly better quality than the rest, wood shining with polish and doorknob gleaming in places with use.

He approaches the first of these doors, noting the floral pattern carved into the door's face. It's gorgeous, in a childish way. He swings it open.

The first thing he notes is the bright sun. He's standing outside, on a grassy knoll. In the distance, a metal gate can be seen enclosing the space and behind him, a massive castle sprawls. There are flowers everywhere and with them, butterflies of every color flit. One lands on Will's nose and as it does, a young girl's laughter fills his ears.

"Hannibal!" The girl, maybe four years old and clad in a bright yellow summer dress, chirps. Although, because of her age, it sounds more like "'Anniba."

A young boy dressed in more mellow brown trousers and a white shirt with suspenders chases after her. He looks barely older than 8, an uncontrollable smile taking over his face as he chases her.

"Mischa!" The boy shouts before continuing in a language Will doesn't recognize. She toddles around him as he pretends to struggle to catch her. Just as she trips the boy—*Hannibal*—swoops in and catches her with his arms around her waist.

He swings her around, muttering calmly in the foreign language, his tone reminiscent of Will's father kindly berating him for running on the docks as a kid. Mischa can't see but Hannibal's brow furrows as the girl in his arms squirms and giggles.

Will can't help but smile at the protective but aware behavior presented by the older sibling. He watches the pair as they chase butterflies and pick flowers, eventually flopping onto the floor so Hannibal can quietly instruct Misca how to braid the stems into a crown for her to wear.

"Hannibal! Aš tave myliu," Mischa mumbles as she places her flower crown on Hannibal's head reverently.

His eyes go wide, processing. He smiles at her and places his own model crown on her head, contentedly replying "Aš tave myliu, mažasis." The crown is a little large on the toddler's head, slipping down enough that her golden eyelashes brush the lowest petals.

The moment makes Will nostalgic for a life he never had, and he blinks in surprise when he notices the pair blurring into their surroundings until they vanish fully. Apparently, the… memory—Will is hesitant to apply the word here but it's the closest he can get without classifying it as the world's weirdest dream—is over.

Will wanders a little more, catching glimpses of the same two children in brief moments of childish bliss, a summer's worth of fun passing by his eyes in fragments. Berry picking, bug finding, and moments where the two are playing with what Will guesses to be Mischa's toys —considering her possessiveness over the items, as seen when Hannibal loses one and must frantically search the surrounding area to stave off a tantrum—all pass by Will. He is an intruder in happy memories but he can't feel guilty for it because of the person it follows and the warm feeling each fills him with.

Will can almost imagine what his own childhood would have been like with a younger sibling by the time the darkness creeps in at the edges of his vision—a small head of dark curls that follows him around unspeaking, like himself at that age. The false memories fill him with a bittersweet ache in his chest, both glad that he is an only child so there wasn't another child subjected to his unmoored childhood and yet simultaneously achingly lonely because of it.

He wakes up with a tear sliding its way down his face to soak into his ratty pillow.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are appreciated! Letting me know how you felt might encourage me to write more which means longer chapters in the future
Next chapter will come out earlier in the day, I promise. Things are gonna start to get angsty soon, sorry Mischa

All who perish here

Chapter Summary

Will explores more of Hannibal's past. He's having a rough time. Sad times begin

Chapter Notes

The chapter title is part of a quote from OTGW again! It's from when the Beast says "All who perish here will become trees for the lantern"
This one isn't super long but if you're hoping for longer chapters, they're coming soon!
Enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will sighs as he opens his eyes to find himself back in the chapel. He had hoped that the third night would put an end to this oddly connected series of dreams. He decides that as long as he's here he will keep himself entertained by watching these… memories? Will doesn't believe in magic but he supposes that saying his dreams of all things are magically appearing manifestations of someone else's memories is the least of his worries, at the moment.

So he makes his way back to the hallway from last night. Standing in front of the door across the hall from the one that led to the door he went through yesterday, taking in its appearance. To some extent, the door's design seems to hint at the content of the memories stored within. He wonders about the deep, stained oak carved with symmetrical squares and framed by two wooden columns, their narrow width and lack of decor discerning them as Tuscan columns, forming either side of the doorframe. It feels old and respected, like an old library or temple for ancient gods.

It looks a little worn with age, with minor knicks and scrapes marring its face but not detracting from its simplistic beauty. Will guesses the memories within can't be too tied to deep emotions, at least not ones worthy of visiting but neutral enough to not be avoided outright.

That is, if what Will has seen for the past few nights even really are memories, which he still pretends they aren't despite the growing evidence to the contrary.

He tentatively opens the door, taking in the old kitchen it reveals. Worn but well-cared-for utensils hang from a hook rack, next to a few pots hanging to dry. Spices fill wooden cabinets with hanging-open doors above the simple stone counters. A cutting board is left out and when Will approaches it he can see half sliced carrots next to a knife. His hand brushes the handle and the memory starts.

A stout woman fizzles into existence next to Will, hand retracting from where she seems to have just set the knife down. She faces Will, a resigned sigh escaping her lips. " *Hannibal* ," She chastizes.

Will sees the boy from earlier memories, maybe a year or so younger judging by the way his head barely meets Will's hip. His hair is darker, like he's spent less time in the sun as of late, or hasn't started spending more time outside. He watches as she scolds the boy, noting how the furrow of her brow deepens as the reactionless stare fuels her ire.

After a pause where it seems like she waits for a response, young Hannibal chirps out "Papa wanted me to practice English. You're one of the few winter employees that speak it, and I like you much better than that mean old gardener. You help me practice and I help you in the kitchen?" A dirty blond eyebrow creeps upward, his cheek dimpling in amusement.

"Oh, Fine!" The woman harrumphs. "Just do as I say and don't get in the way. I don't see why that father of yours has you 'practicing', you're fluent in any language you're tasked to learn before the year is up." She motions him closer, standing behind him as she shows him the proper knife positioning.

By the time he's finished with the first carrot, Hannibal is staring in awe at the even little rounds he's managed to slice. "Gabija! I did it," he whispers the last part to himself. "Oh, Gabija you must let me help you more! I can make Mischa her favorite foods now!"

The woman—Gabija—chuckles at that. "Hannibal, Mischa is barely old enough to speak, how will she tell you what her favorites are? She was such a sweet baby anyways, never threw a fuss at mealtime."

“I’ll make her everything, then! Until she can tell me her favorites, I simply have to learn as many recipes as I can,” Hannibal blinks up at her, completely serious.

“You’ll be in here practicing English a bit then, hm?” She smiles at him, winking as she jokes, “Good thing I could use a sous chef.”

The memory fades with the pair’s chatter echoing through the room.

Will wants to be mad at Gabija for teaching Hannibal to cook, wants to blame her for his unusual eating habits. He wants to blame a lot of people. Hannibal’s father, for teaching him English. Hannibal’s mother, for birthing him in the first place. Hannibal, for turning out so peculiar despite what seems to be a typical, if not slightly pampered, childhood. Himself, for trusting Hannibal not to betray him in the first place.

He can’t summon up much will to do any of that, besides blaming himself. Even Hannibal is difficult to pin blame to, for how do you fault someone for following their instincts, behaving in a way that fits the established pattern. Hannibal wasn’t to blame for the fact that Will didn’t see through his disguise until the metaphorical knife was lodged in his back. Or the literal ear in his esophagus.

Will backs out of the room through the same door he entered. He ends up back in the hallway, staring at the tan of his work boots. He distantly feels comforted by the fact that he isn’t being subjected to the horrors of the BSHCI garb, if only in his brain.

He stands in the hallway for a moment longer, internally debating. If what he’s seeing is, in fact, a collection of half-collected memories of Hannibal’s, he needs to find out more about why Hannibal thinks the way he does, and more importantly, if there’s a way to get back at him.

So he moves across the hall once more, to the next door. It’s similar to the first door, with carved butterflies and flowers, but a touch more decrepit, abandoned. It’s as though the memory or memories stored within aren’t visited often, but might still relate to Mischa.

Tentatively, he clasps the dirty golden handle and turns, revealing the yard from the first memories he saw of Mischa and Hannibal.

It's winter now, just barely. Several inches of snow line the cleared walkways but some trees in the distance still hold onto their last few orange-red leaves. Will's breath puffs out in front of him as he exhales sharply at the biting cold. He looks down to see that on top of his usual flannel and jeans rests a fur coat that reaches down to his knees. It's not something he ever owned, too fancy in a practical way, but he thinks that he's seen Hannibal wear something similar once or twice.

He scrunches his nose at the cold and takes a few steps toward the sprawling entrance of the castle, footsteps crunching as snow mixes with dirt under his feet. When he stands a few yards away from the first step, Hannibal and Mischa appear.

Hannibal, older than Will has ever seen him in his youth up until now, stands defensively in front of Mischa, hands holding her in place behind him. "Mischa, go inside!" he shouts, seemingly repeating the phrase in the now-familiar foreign language.

She ignores him each time, wriggling in his arms to try and peer around his broader frame. "Mama! Tėtis!"

Will whips around just in time to see a massive tank crash through the treeline. A man peeks up from within, machine gun drawn.

A woman stands next to a crashed plane, smoke still rising from the wreckage. The scent of burnt flesh and singed hair burns his nose. He watches as the woman tugs desperately at the debris, trying to pull a man out from under a massive hunk of stray metal.

The gun turns in her direction. He flinches as the first shot echoes through the air, Mischa's shouts for her parents echoing across the field. The gun swivels once more, in Will's direction. Towards a young Hannibal and Mischa. *Oh god, please no*.

He turns around again to see Hannibal pick up Mischa by the waist and shuffle as fast as he can towards the ajar front door. Gunshots pierce the air once more, tailing the two as they

rush inside. Hannibal manages to duck behind the doorframe just as a bullet lodges itself into the floor where his foot was just a moment prior.

Will watches as a group of soldiers reconvene by the plane crash, gesturing toward the castle and the sky. Snowflakes flutter to the ground, just a few at first but it only takes a few moments before a large breeze carries with it a larger storm.

He stands silently in a foot of snow, watching the last of the group creep inside the Lecter family home. Eventually, the darkness surrounds him, finally carrying him away.

He wakes up sobbing quietly, tucked under his ratty prison blanket and shivering violently. He lays in bed until the first rays of sunlight creep through the high window at the end of the hall and an orderly shoves his breakfast tray through the slot.

Chapter End Notes

I am basing the first door's style on neoclassical architecture popular in Lithuania in the late 18th to late 19th centuries, particularly late neoclassical architecture which is referred to as Empire Style. This is the period I decided that Lecter Manor was built in because I do not know if there is a canonical date of construction and I like the columns popular in the style.
Much of Lithuania's neoclassical architecture was destroyed during its Soviet occupation after WWII. I think that the Lecters, a proud family, would not take kindly to the rebuilding of historical architecture and would therefore try their best to keep as much of the original neoclassical design in place.
Gabija, the cook, is named after the Lithuanian goddess of fire and home. I thought it was fitting
The next chapter will be up in a week! As an update on progress, I've got chapter 7 almost complete :^). Chapter 4 just needs editing

The Death of Hope

Chapter Summary

Will finds out what happened to Micha and he gets a clue as to what Hannibal does when he has the opportunity to explore Will's house uninterrupted. Featuring: Beverly, Jane Eyre, and Hannibal's habit of smelling Will and Will's stuff

Chapter Notes

The chapter title is, once again, from Over the Garden Wall.
Warning for off-screen, heavily implied child death
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Beverly visits him that day. She's angry, he knows. He doesn't blame her much. The evidence overwhelmingly points in his direction and she is a woman of science, facts. The facts say that Will killed at least 5 people, including Abigail Hobbs and Georgia Madchen, two people whom she was involved in the investigations surrounding. Much more personally than the average investigation, because of Will.

But still, she comes. She goes to see him when rage flows coldly through her veins, betrayal just barely concealed by a clenched jaw and a bored façade. She sits silently in the chair across from him. She sits in a plastic chair across from Will's small private cage in the therapy room when she has no obligation to. He feels a sliver of hope course through him, though he tries to smother it.

She is waiting to see if she can calm herself a little before she starts an argument neither of them wants right now. He takes the opportunity from her, speaking up suddenly. "Do you believe in dream-sharing?"

She quirks an eyebrow at him. "What the hell, Graham? I visit you in prison and you want to talk about-about *dream-sharing?* " she splutters angrily.

He nods. “I’ve had some… interesting dreams. Things that can’t be explained away by an empathy disorder and an unhealthy emotional attachment to my psychiatrist.”

“Well, I know it’s a technique where two people discuss their dreams to try and remember them better, but I don’t think that’s what you’re asking for. I had a kooky high school history teacher who believed that dream-sharing was possible between two intimately close individuals, both physically and mentally. Is that what you’re looking for?”

Will’s brow furrows as he thinks. “That… that might be it, I suppose. I don’t like what that insinuates about my relationship with Hann-Doctor Lecter, but I suppose we had a level of intimacy that I’d never reached with anyone else before. At least, we did before he framed me for murder and shoved the ear of my surrogate daughter down my throat.”

Beverly groans. “This again? Will, spouting nonsense isn’t going to convince me you didn’t murder at least five people! What do you even get out of this, some sick joy from torturing everyone you know? And anyway, even if you weren’t lying about the dream-sharing bullshit, why now, huh? What magically unlocked unfettered access to Hannibal Lecter’s brain for you now?

Will’s eyes go wide. “I know. I know about the cannibalism, serial murder, how he plays with people’s lives for fun. I’m not lying Bev, what reason would I have for making myself seem even more insane than people believe me to be? A few extra lifetimes spent in here, as opposed to the electric chair? You know I can’t stand Chilton. Please Bev, if you can’t believe me about anything else, believe me when I say that I have seen Hannibal’s memories, walked the halls of his mind for the past three nights.” He doesn’t know when he grabbed the bars of the small cage but his fingers ache with the pressure and his knuckles are white.

“Okay, okay fine! Just this thing, I’ll make an effort to believe you. But you gotta make the effort to convince me, first. Give me something that no one, not even you, should know. I’ll go to Hannibal, weasel around for an answer, and if it matches and he seems like he hasn’t told you then I’ll believe you.”

Will nods frantically, sagging forward in his seat. “Yes, anything. Thank you, Beverly. Ask him… ask about if he has a sister. She’s younger than him by just a little bit, maybe four years or so, but she’s likely blonde. Her name’s Mischa. He never told me, he doesn’t talk at all about his family.

“Ask Alana first, if you have to, to verify his secrecy. Make sure you bring it up naturally though, because if he gets even a hint of a sense that it’s an interrogation then who knows what he’ll say. Then you might never verify the truth of what I’m saying.”

~

Beverly doesn’t get back to him until after she first approaches with a new case. She promises the case will give her more opportunities to casually talk with Hannibal, as he is apparently replacing Will as the BAU’s new consulting profiler.

She sits across from him now, brow furrowed as she questions him. “You don’t have a *single* new piece of information that would help me figure out what the hell is going on? Don’t you ‘visit’ every night?” Her unbelieving scowl and finger quotes have Will huffing a laugh.

“Bev, believe me when I say it’s nearly as difficult to learn about Doctor Lecter through his memories as it is in person. If I’m not reliving his most traumatic moments, that is. I’ve had enough child endangerment for the month, *thankyouverymuch* , I’ve been sticking mostly to the inconsequential memories as much as I can since I stumbled across horrific parent murder.

“Cooking lessons, hide and seek, watching cats hunt rats, that sort of thing. I know Mischa’s favorite color is brown and she likes when Hannibal carries her on his shoulders, not that it seems that he was tall enough to do that for her for long. All of the memories with her seem to happen early on in his childhood.” Will’s brow furrows.

“So, you think she died young? Soon after the parents, most likely. That’s rough.”

Will only hums in agreement. While he knows it doesn’t excuse Hannibal’s behaviors in adulthood, and he showed tendencies to be manipulative as a child, his past likely only exacerbated a personality type prone to isolation and violent thoughts, leading to violent tendencies. Whatever happened to Mischa might’ve been the straw to break the camel’s back.

He doesn't *really* want to know though. He *has* been avoiding all the doors that look more worn-down or abandoned, the slightest scratch that might be associated with a sprained ankle just as likely to conceal memories of a cold winter many decades ago.

Beverly sighs as the silence creeps on for a minute. "Yeah, Graham. I do this for you, you nudge me in the right direction with the case. Hannibal liked what you said, by the way. About the color palate. Said it was fascinating, and then called me out for taking words right out of your mouth. Got my ass handed to me by Jack and immediately set free to keep it up, but he didn't notice until Hannibal pointed it out. He knows you, intimately. Knows your manner of speaking, your thought process. He knows when you're speaking even when you aren't present."

Will tries to smother the warmth that settles in his chest at that. "Hannibal's spent so much time burrowing his way into my brain I'd be surprised if he hadn't memorized a bit of the layout."

"You sound like him, sometimes. And he sounds like you. If he seems to have you all figured out then why isn't he in your head like you are with him? Or maybe he is and he didn't want to embarrass you?"

Will scoffs, glancing around the room to gather his thoughts. "The way I organize my memories is less 'mind palace' and more 'stream of consciousness'. I focus my thoughts through introspection done while imagining I'm standing knee-deep in the stream on my property. Just like in real life. If Doctor Lecter's been seeing that every night, he'd've gone insane by now, pissed that I've soaked his imaginary silk pajama set, even unintentionally."

"Fishing? You just, what, zone out and pretend to fish?"

"Yep."

"Quite the catch, you are."

Silence. Then, "Was that a pun? Did you just- Really, Bev? Now, who's the weird one?"

Beverly snickers for a moment, freezing as she catches herself. She flops back fully into her seat, muttering to herself as her fingers glide through her hair. “Joking with a serial killer who has soul mate-esque dreams with your coworker, really Beverly? What would your mother say if she found out?”

She leaves soon after, promising to question Doctor Lecter and bring him more information about the new body they had discovered. “I can’t just smuggle every case file out of FBI headquarters the day I get ‘em, I’ll be back by the end of the week. Bye, Graham.”

Will sighs to himself as the orderly escorts him out of the private interview room and back to his cell. The orderly takes his handcuffs off, slams the door closed, and tosses a brief “Dinner will be sent out shortly,” as he rushes down the hall. Judging by the amount of palm sweat he left behind in Will’s wrists he was nervous to be in the presence of the alleged Chesapeake Ripper any longer than necessary.

Will isn’t looking forward to dinner. The same piles of lukewarm mush and cartons of questionably labeled ‘fruits juice’ served every night at 7:00 pm on the dot only make Will’s stomach churn. He finds himself missing the few meals he had shared with Hannibal and he mentally berates himself.

Doctor Lecter is a lying, manipulative cannibal, and didn’t deserve the emotional effort of being missed, no matter how easy it was sometimes. Especially as mush and juice slide through a narrow entrance in the side of his cell, as unappetizing as ever.

He picks at it halfheartedly before settling in for bed, determined to press deeper into the history behind Doctor Lecter. He closes his eyes.

It takes a while of laying in silence, but eventually, he can open his eyes to the now-familiar sight of the entrance to Doctor Lecter’s mind palace. From there it’s a quick walk to the hallway of his childhood.

Will stands in front of the nearest decrepit door, the first one he decided to skip over nearly four weeks back. It’s scratched and chipping in certain places, an easily recognizable bullet hole embedded in the door frame. He opens the door to Lecter’s ancestral home.

The first thing he notices is the snow, the cold. The foyer has snow scattered across it, holes in the ceiling allowing the cold to seep in and build up. Unlike last time there is no jacket draped across his shoulders to protect him from the cold, his usual flannel replaced with a ratty shirt covered in streaks of dirt. The cold burns, he feels like he's on fire.

He stumbles down the main hallway, shoulders tense as he prepares for a memory to start at any moment. He makes it to the first partially open door before he sees anything. As he peers through the crack into the room, they appear. Hannibal and Mischa are huddled together in the farthest corner, breaths visible as they shiver.

Heavy rope binds their hands in place, locking them to a table that looks all too heavy for either young child to shift an inch. Mischa lets out a dry cough, little lungs rattling violently as the cold burns her throat. Hannibal tucks her head into his arms, hiding her from the chill as much as possible.

He sees Hannibal glance toward the door moments before footsteps echo down the hallway from where Will had wandered. A glance over his shoulder reveals some of the same soldiers as before. He stumbles back just as the first man reaches for the door.

They shuffle in single file and the siblings squish into the wall as much as possible. One man shouts an order from the rear and the closest man to the pair reaches forward to tug Mischa out of Hannibal's arms, both of them shrieking as they're separated.

Hannibal shouts after Mischa, growing louder when Mischa is overtaken by a coughing fit that has her trembling in the man's arms.

Will follows them, wondering how long it can go on until the memory ends. Eventually, they reach a section of the house that Will doesn't recognize from his way down before the men, and Mischa, fade away.

Will makes his way back to the room, shocked to see Hannibal still there. He sits in complete silence, staring blankly at the wall next to the door. His hands clasp a toddler-sized shoe in a stranglehold. Tears cut lines through the dirt caked on his face. Will feels a cough of his own tickle his throat.

He goes to the nearest wall and slumps against it. Color seems to seep from the world like his eyes can't process that beauty could still exist. He doesn't know how much time passes but eventually, footsteps echo down the hallway from the direction the men went.

The man who gave the command to take Mischa limps down the hall. Will can see now that he seems to have sprained it somehow. He wishes he could stick out his leg and send the man careening to the floor, have the bowl clasped in his hands clatter to the floor. But he can't, because this is a dream.

And, he thinks to himself, he doesn't know if he would have the willpower to intentionally deprive Hannibal of food right now even if he could. He's so small, and it's so cold. He doesn't know how the boy had made it out.

The man coos in Russian at Hannibal, offering the bowl of soup. He clicks his tongue at him when Hannibal swipes his hand out in an attempt to claw into the man's arm. He sets the bowl on the floor and scoots it forward with his foot until it's just within arm's reach. Then, with one last smirk and what is obviously a bid to enjoy his meal, the man leaves Hannibal alone.

The steam rising from the bowl soon tempts Hannibal too much and he tentatively grabs it and spoons the first bite into his mouth. His eyes light up and Will wonders how long it's been since the last time he's eaten.

The bowl is nearly empty when Hannibal looks down to scoop some more up and pauses. His small fingers hesitantly pull something small and white from the leftover broth. The object slips from his grasp and clatters back into the bowl and Will scoots forward to see what startled the boy. Hannibal's hand slaps over his mouth as he takes deep breaths and tries not to scream.

Will glances down. Seven small teeth peek out of the soup, child-sized and gleaming in the low light. "Mischa."

Will stumbles back, slamming into the doorframe across the hallway. His breath, like Hannibal's, comes out in pants. Tears stream down both of their faces.

His hand fumbles blindly for the door handle behind him. A wail rises in his throat, seconds from bursting from his chest just as he manages to throw the door open and fall backward into the room. His leg kicks out to close the door just as a matching shout of Hannibal's begins.

The door slams closed and he presses himself against the wall, curled into a ball. Will stays like that until his sobs have turned into sniffles and his breathing has slowed. He risks a glance up, a sigh of relief puffing past his lips as he realized he is in another hallway.

Unlike the one filled with memories of Hannibal's childhood, this one contains doors that all look vastly different from one another, worn with use but not necessarily age. These memories, aside from the ones contained behind the door behind him, are visited frequently.

A few doors down, he notices something odd. The door is his own, the front door for his house in Wolf Trap. Curiosity piqued, he reaches a shaky hand out and slowly eases the door open.

Behind his front door lies another hallway, this time filled with doors he recognizes. Another copy of his front door, the motel that he stayed in back in Minnesota, Hannibal's office. Each door is one he's seen time and time again. He opens the second version of his front door.

Behind it, like the real deal, lies his living room. For a moment, his own memory of Doctor Lecter shoving a tube, and Abigail Hobbs' ear, down his throat flickers in his mind. He decides to stay away from the kitchen for now. Instead, he steps forward to examine his bookshelf. Depending on what books he has out, he might be able to estimate when the memory or memories within occurred.

He's right. There, in its new place on the top shelf, is a book on neuroscience that Doctor Lecter had him borrow after the mushroom garden case. He had finished it and given it back four weeks later, after the lost boys' case.

His dogs materialize into their beds as the sound of a car's engine approaches outside. He knows before he turns around that it's Hannibal, it's the only person who makes sense, but the sight of the man bundled up in a long brown coat and deep red scarf still makes his stomach twist uncomfortably. Some part of him is still warmed by his presence, and he works desperately to smother it.

The dogs swarm Doctor Lecter, barking and sniffing in excitement. To Will's surprise, Doctor Lecter pulls a small paper bag out of his pockets and dutifully gives each dog a sausage bite before showering the most excitable dogs in affection. Eventually, he heads into the kitchen to prepare their food. Most likely, this memory takes place one of the times he was out of state during the lost boys' case when he had asked Han—Doctor Lecter to watch his dogs.

Eventually, Doctor Lecter has fit a whole roast into the oven and fed all the dogs. Will watches as he sinks onto the couch, Buster lifted onto his lap. Doctor Lecter's eyes close as he relaxes, his chest rising as he takes a deep breath. He looks… content, at peace. Happy to just exist in Will's home, with his dogs pawing at his coat and licking his outstretched hand.

Will feels awkward watching such a solitary yet intimate moment and he stumbles back into the bookshelf. From where he stands, Will can now only see the back of Doctor Lecter's head.

He glances back at the books behind him and marvels as a shimmering curtain seems to fall from in front of it, revealing a slight change in the books kept there. Now, the book on neuroscience is gone and his copy of Jane Eyre, which usually sits a shelf below and just to the right, is missing.

The sound of a page-turning forces a sigh from his lips before he can stop it. Will turns around and is completely unsurprised to find Hannibal—in an outfit with a few fewer layers this time, he's got his typical gaudy suit on but the jacket is hanging on the coat rack by the door—holding the missing book.

He's flipped to a random page and now he begins to read aloud. "'... you are good to those who are good to you. It is all I ever desire to be. If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way; they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter but would grow worse and worse. When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should - so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again.'

"Well-loved. It's fascinating to see into our dear Will's mind like this, isn't it Buster?" The dog in question has settled at Doctor Lecter's feet but his tail picks up in a rapid wag when he is addressed. Little traitor. "It seems as if he views himself as a harbinger of justice, the force

keeping wickedness at bay. But the qualifications for wickedness are so vague, what might he view wicked when released from the restraints of societal expectations?”

Buster, unsurprisingly, doesn’t respond. Doctor Lecter doesn’t mind, bending down to pick up the small dog. “Let us read it in his place, hm? I can read aloud to you,” he says, carrying Buster and Jane Eyre to the couch where the two of them once again settle. He sits sideways on the couch, looking incredibly comfortable in his auburn dress shirt and now unbuttoned checkered black waistcoat with matching pants collecting short brown fur occasionally shed as Buster shifts to curl into a ball on his lap. He opens the book to the first page and begins to read, soothing accent surrounding Will despite his hushed tone.

He doesn’t consciously settle in the chair across the couch but he finds himself there anyway, enjoying the moment. The haze of his impending wakefulness creeps in at the edges of his vision once more yet he feels content to stay where he is, eyes slipping closed and listening to Hannibal read. Eventually, he wakes up, only realizing it when the whispered reading fades from his ears fully.

Chapter End Notes

I am not as far as I planned on being into writing later chapters of this fic, but don't worry! That won't affect my posting schedule. Chapter 7 is just nearly twice as long as this one
I have family over this week, until mid-Saturday, so that means I'm finding more excuses to hide in my room, which means more writing when I have the energy, but it also means I'm even more tired than usual by the end of the day, and that's my go-to writing time

Grow, Tiny Seed

Chapter Summary

Will explores more of Hannibal's recent memories and learns a few things about the women in their lives. Will gets jealous and then gets a good shock.

Chapter Notes

The chapter title is from OTGW again! It's a line from the song Come Wayward Souls.
P.s. I love Alana, I just also know that Will can be very petty and mean when he's jealous
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next night, Will settles into bed deciding to investigate more into the memories in his house. Maybe, he thinks to himself, there'll be some incriminating evidence that will bring Will's own locked away memories to the forefront of his mind. He falls asleep, opening his eyes to the familiar sight of the steps leading to the chapel.

Will wanders room to room, following the mental path he created of his trip from last night until he stops in front of the door leading to Hannibal's final memories of his childhood home. He hesitates, fingers brushing the doorknob before he decides to take the door to a room adjacent to this one. He hopes it'll be a shortcut to Will's house.

Will steps through, immediately noting the distant familiarity of his new surroundings. Definitively not his house, judging by the small room with only a closet and bathroom off-shooting from it. A hotel room, then.

He is shocked to realize Hannibal himself is hot on his heels, materializing behind him in a painfully familiar scene. Gelled back hair, pristine suit, and a bag dangling from his bent elbow, containing what Will now knows are the expertly prepared remains of Cassie Boyle.

Will settles himself against the wall farthest from both the door and the table they had sat at and is shocked to see a memory version of himself materialize behind Hannibal, grumpily leading the intruder to the table as he sets up food. Will at first uses this new perspective to analyze Hannibal's face, now well aware of his most minute tells. Hannibal's lips twitch as Memory Will grumbles about staying professional and Will finally designs to glance at himself fully.

He is startled by how beautiful he looks, the bags he knows he had that day nearly imperceptible in Hannibal's eyes, his hair catching the sun's rays and turning a rich chocolate color. His smile beams across at him, at *Hannibal* , and Will catches as Memory Hannibal's gaze turns particularly warm when Memory Will looks down to focus on the meal in front of him.

After the meal, just like how it happened in Will's recollection, Memory Will scavenges a decent outfit from his suitcase and sequesters himself into the bathroom to get ready for the day. Will stays in the main room with Hannibal and watches as he turns to the bed as soon as the click of the bathroom door lock sounds through the room.

Hannibal settles a thigh against the bed, reaching a hand down to feel for the remaining warmth from Will's body. Hannibal's hands gently grasp the disturbed pillow, the one Will's head had rested on all night, before bringing it close to his face and inhaling deeply. Hannibal sighs, muttering, "Really a dreadful aftershave. Something with cedar or citrus would complement his natural scents without overwhelming them, I'd say."

Will feels his face flush, the tips of his ears warming as the knowledge that Hannibal regularly scents Will without his knowing settles on him. He turns toward the closet door and flings it open, hoping to find some form of reprieve.

Luckily, the other side reveals a bedroom, dark and large. Flinging the door closed carelessly behind him, Will observes his environment fully. To the left are two doors, one a sliding shōji door that likely leads to a walk-in closet, the other a dark oak door that opens to reveal the familiar end of the hallway in Hannibal's house. A large California King bed with navy blue sheets and a matching comforter takes up most of the center of the room, with a nightstand made of stained dark oak on either side. Will is currently standing in Hannibal's *bedroom* .

To make matters worse, there is someone *in* the bed. The lump moves and Will realizes there are *two* people in bed. Anger sears through Will like a lightning bolt, quick-moving and just

as devastating. His feet find themselves inching forward, squinting in the low light to see who accompanies Hannibal.

Long, dark curls frame a pale shoulder that peeks from the comforter, the only comfort being the pale spaghetti strap of some sort of top just visible on Hannibal's bedfellow's shoulder and visible upper back. A familiar shoulder, he realizes, as the spark of anger warps into something violent and spiteful. *Alana* .

Will is distracted from his anger when the first figure, now definitively Hannibal, begins to move again. He shifts from being curled around Alana to laying on his other side, creeping closer to the edge of the bed. His brow furrows in his sleep and he huffs frustratedly. His hand twitches to the side, fingers clasped tightly around an imaginary object, which he tries to curl into his chest. Will is reminded of the small boy clutching an even smaller shoe for hours in the cold.

Unexpectedly, Hannibal lets out a loud sob, and Alana jerks into wakefulness. She blinks, trying to get a sense of what's going on before her attention—and Will's—is once more grabbed by a shuddered sob.

"Hannibal?" she whispers, gently shaking his arm. Nothing happens at first, but when she turns Hannibal onto his back and peers over him, the noises begin to subside. A little more poking and patting at his shoulder, and his breathing slows.

Hannibal cracks an eye open and, in the most broken voice Will has ever heard him speak in, croaks out "Will?" as his eyes land on Alana.

She sighs, misunderstanding. "Oh Hannibal, it's alright now. It was just a dream. Did you have a nightmare about Will?"

Hannibal nods slowly and Will knows he's lying to avoid talking about what memories linger when he closes his eyes. "He haunts my every waking moment, and now still manages to find his way into my dreams. The loss of him from our lives troubles me greatly."

Will is shocked by the honesty that distracts from his white lie. Alana, once again missing massive amounts of context, nods knowingly. “He was close, with both of us. And his… betrayal,” Will feels the previously forgotten anger bubble up again at that, “has affected all of us greatly. I dream about him too, I have nightmares about what he could have done to Abigail.”

Hannibal’s arm, bare now, Will notices, slips around Alana’s shoulders and he pulls her closer to him. “It’s best we do not linger on such troubling thoughts now. Sleep again, Alana. Forgive me for disturbing you.”

Alana begins to chastise him as Will backs inches toward the closest closed door, the shōji door leading to the closet. He can’t believe Doctor Lecter *replaced him* with some lousy version of himself, Alana would *never* understand him as well as Will himself does without trying, she would never accept him-

Except, Will realizes, grief sinking into his gut and making his shoulders droop, Will never accepted him either, which made him just as bad as Alana, in some ways. Will knows intimately the desire to be seen, understood but not judged, and yet when he saw Hannibal he rejected him. Bitter tears try to escape but he blinks them back. He needs to be more careful about slipping into Doctor Lecter's head like that.

No , Will never rejected him, was never given the chance to. He knows on some level, deep down, that if Doctor Lecter has just been his friend like he thought he was, had opened up to him about his own darker thoughts, Will would have accepted it. But he never gave Will the choice, deciding that fucking up his whole life was better than genuine honesty. And Will *hates* him for it, wanting to see the life bleed from his eyes at the same time the realization that Will was not to be trifled with hits. The mental image fuels him to swing the door open carelessly.

The door reveals Doctor Lecter’s dining room, the darkness that precedes wakefulness just beginning to blur the edges of his vision. One more memory, then. The table is set for three, with Abigail sitting at the seat across the table from him and what he assumes to be the door to the kitchen.

Hannibal enters the room from the door behind Will, carrying a plate filled with fried potato cubes which he settles next to the Croque Madame on each plate. Abigail sways too far in her seat when giving Doctor Lecter room, his hand quickly darting out to gently settle on her

shoulder and correct her posture. Will finally looks at her face and her pupils are blown. She's… drugged?

The doorbell rings and Doctor Lecter rushes to answer it, quickly returning with Alana on his heels. She takes one look at Abigail, still swaying gently in her seat, and tugs Doctor Lecter by the arm into the kitchen, Will following not long after through the still-open door.

Alana is pissed. Apparently, Doctor Lecter snuck Abigail out of the hospital without her permission. Alana inevitably is coerced into letting most of her anger go, with the bonus of joining the two for dinner. Doctor Lecter warns Alana that he had given Abigail half a Valium to soothe her anxieties, which Will mentally calls bullshit on. Will is surprised to note that he also lies when he says that he had been hoping that Alana would join them when she questions the presence of the third plate, already piled with breakfast foods.

He wonders if maybe he had expected Will to show up to what is his attempt at a family dinner. He brushes the thought aside as the three in the memory settle in for dinner.

Abigail is spacy, dazed and quiet besides the occasional nonsensical mumble about family and breakfast for dinner. Alana must still be a little mad at Doctor Lecter as she doesn't initiate conversation as much as she tends to. When no one is looking, Will catches him grinning pleasedly at his plate.

Eventually, Alana leaves and Doctor Lecter convinces her to let Abigail spend the night if only to sleep off the 'Valium'. Hannibal escorts Abigail to a spare room on the second floor, somehow already set up with her tastes in mind. Lavender walls and pop art, a desk neatly organized to display a setup where she could work on homework or hobbies if she wanted, and a bed with a sky blue comforter and matching pillowcases.

Hannibal tucks Abigail in, the effects of whatever he drugged her with finally starting to visibly wear off as her steps are a little more confident. Just as he turns to leave, Hannibal is stopped by a slender hand on his wrist. Abigail peers up at him with big doe eyes. "You wanted Will to have dinner with us." It's not a question but Hannibal nods anyway.

"Why didn't you just invite him over? Neither of you will replace my parents, not really, but you can do right by them. Support me, help me move past what happened. We could be a family!" Abigail's eyes widen and a manic grin slices across her face.

Hannibal sighs. "You know why I cannot. Not yet. Will must accept certain aspects of himself before I could ever hope to see him accept those same parts of me. I must force him to face what he believes to be the worst aspects of himself, in an environment in which he cannot run away from them. Then, and only then, do we have hope of honestly discussing our family, violence, or nightmares."

Abigail nods like she had known all along, tucking her chin under the covers. "Agent Crawford is going to destroy that before we can get it. Will lied about how it felt to kill someone, I know it. Jack emboldens his grip on morality with his meddling." She scowls, brow furrowing deeper at the thought of Jack.

"Yes, I am working to distance Will from Jack. In the meantime, I must protect you from him in a way Will cannot; we must plan your disappearance. That will happen in its own time, I promise. For now, though, you must sleep off the last of your tea so that I can alleviate Doctor Bloom of her worries about you. Sleep well, Abigail."

“Night, Hann’b’l.” She wiggles her fingers in a wave at his departing back as she snuggles deeper under the covers.

Will watches as Hannibal gently closes the door to Abigail's room. *Did Hannibal fake Abigail's death? It* was *only an ear.* Why would Hannibal allow Will to believe that he had killed Abigail? Would Hannibal ever tell Will about her continued existence, if it even is real?

He could have lied to her, he could have changed his mind sometime between that night and now. Will wants to let the anger he feels settling in his gut rise to consume him but its growth is smothered by the fact that Hannibal *did* want a family, with Will and Abigail. He watches as Abigail’s breathing settles and sleep overtakes her. Will wakes up that morning with tears streaming down his face.

Chapter End Notes

As an update on my progress, I'm almost finished with chapter 8. There might be a few more chapters after that unless I get a new plotline idea after this one is done. Would

anyone be interested in a Spacedogs kidfic? I've been working on that story too, though not as consistently as this one

My Wounded Heart Resides Back Home, In Pieces

Chapter Summary

Will gets glimpses of how much Hannibal needs him in his life, and he begins plotting.

Chapter Notes

The chapter title is, once again, from OTGW. I am very pleased with this chapter! This setup allows me to introduce two of my favorite minor characters (who also happen to beat the shit out of Hannibal in canon, or die trying)! I didn't mean to post this late but this week is wonky enough with the holiday that school stuff in addition to that really threw me off! Next chapter will (hopefully) be on time!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will spends the next three nights in what he decides is the foyer to Hannibal's mind palace. On the day after the third night of ignoring Doctor Lecter in the only way he can now when he’s too busy to stop by, Beverly visits.

He is led to the private discussion cages and locked in before the door swings open to let her in. She looks nice, the formality of her white blouse cut by the black jeans and similarly dark leather jacket she wears. Her hair is, unusually, pulled up into a low bun, out of her face.

“We found the killer’s lair,” she starts. “Followed your instruction and followed the river up ‘til we found corn. But that’s not what you’re hoping to hear about, huh?”

Will nods. He’s been looking forward to the day she gets back to him about the dream-sharing, bored out of his mind by the lack of progress in his case in court.

“Yeah, ‘s what I thought. I questioned Alana first as you suggested. Really, I hinted that I thought Hannibal was interesting and wondered if he had a sister I could scoop up. She says he’s never mentioned one, or any other family.” That makes Will nod, frowning. He expected that Alana would be a dead-end, especially since he’s seen how Mischa… But he doesn’t tell

Bev that; it doesn't feel like it's appropriate to discuss Doctor Lecter's depressing history of accidental cannibalism with her. Will ignores the shiver of violent satisfaction that runs down his spine at the thought of being the singular entity to know this much about Doctor Lecter.

"So I brought up my own sister once while discussing the case with him. Asked if he had any siblings. You wanna know what he said? I shit you not, word for word he said 'I did, once, though I lost her and my parents at a young age.' Fuckin' hell Graham, you're right about this. Almost makes me wonder what else you're right about, but those sad puppy dog eyes he had when discussing his dead sister don't do much to convince me he's a cannibalistic serial killer."

Will almost prods, questions if she will look into Doctor Lecter despite that, but something gives him pause. He remembers the look of hope on Abigail's face when they discussed building a family with Will, the determination on Hannibal's own peering back at her. He keeps quiet, the part of him usually screaming for vengeance eerily silent.

He looks at the case file for Bev again, mumbles something about the body in the center not belonging in the color palette. She leaves, satisfied, and Will is escorted back to his cage thinking about lavender walls and family dinners.

That night, he decides to look into Hannibal's more recent memories. Hannibal hasn't visited since the dreams started, the trial's been slow and Hannibal is likely busy filling the big shoes Will left at the BAU. He wonders if Hannibal knows, if Hannibal is the reason he finds his way back to his mind palace every evening when he closes his eyes. Or, contrarily, maybe Hannibal has no clue and Will has been presented with a chance to gain the upper hand, figure out exactly what the hell Will means to Hannibal.

Will's presence is one of the newest things in Hannibal's life; all he has to do is keep exploring in that area. Probably. That night, he makes his way back to the corridor that starts with memories involving Will. Only now does he take in just how long this hallway is.

The end is hardly a speck in the distance, with doors framing either side, equidistant from the doors on either side of them but each door itself looks vastly different. There is one similarity between each door he can see, a shiny golden doorknob carved with calla lilies appearing as though they sprout from the door as they grow to surround the doorknob itself.

Will walks past the first few doors hoping to skip to the room preceding the one with memories of Abigail. Maybe one day he'll go back, see if there are any other memories of her. For now, he opens the next door. Will takes in the sight of Hannibal's office, normal until he mindlessly brushes a finger against Hannibal's chair. Hannibal appears there, sitting alone.

The dark of night creeps in, and then the darkness continues to spread, unnatural shadows deepening under Hannibal's eyes and cheekbones. He looks like death incarnate. Not the usual form, cool and calculating, taking lives at each fleeting whim. No, now he resembled a slow death, draining and exhaustive, where you start mourning long before it happens.

Hannibal looks as though he's lost all sense of self, an ideal crumbling between dexterous fingers as a new being rises from the ashes, completely unrecognizable from its previous form. Will watches, trying to find the cause of Hannibal's turmoil. He realizes the tick of the second hand of the clock moving is much louder than normal and notes the time, 7:33 pm, and it clicks. *Hannibal is waiting for Will* .

Is this the day he visited Will in his office before they caught the Organ Harvester? If so, then Hannibal should be leaving soon to find Will. But for the next ten minutes, Will watches Hannibal alone in his office, staring at the chair across from his. For the entire hour that their appointments used to last, he sits in silence, with Will observing, clinical and curious like a bored god. By the time the memory fades the dark that precedes his inevitable waking creeps in at the edges. He has time for only one more memory, though he doesn't regret the time he spent here.

Will wants to see if there are any other memories stored in here that might be of import so he wanders to the desk. He notes a scalpel on the desk, placed parallel to a pencil that Doctor Lecter uses to sharpen it.

Will's fingers brush the scalpel and a memory begins. A nervous voice cracks from behind him. " *You* were a referral!" A patient sits in the chair across from Doctor Lecter, wringing his hands as he shouts.

"I'm also a part of the problem," Doctor Lecter soothes. "You focus too much on your therapist and not enough on your therapy." He crosses one long leg over the other, imposing figure seeming to stretch to fill the space in the room like a shadow.

“You lost respect for me because I wouldn’t report Tobias, wouldn’t you?” the patient cries.

Neither man seems to notice the third guest—or fourth, counting Will himself—in the room until he announces himself. “Report Tobias for what?”

The patient flinches when Tobias Budge speaks up. “T-Tobias?”

Standing quietly in a way that intentionally avoids drawing attention to himself, Doctor Lecter places himself beside his patient, slightly in front of him. If Will were less perceptive he would think it a protective gesture instead of the possessive one he knows it to be. Lecter has no plans of letting him interfere with his schemes for his patient.

“I came to say goodbye, Franklyn.”

“What do you mean, goodbye?” The patient, Franklyn, whimpers. “Oh my god! Is that your blood?” Will knows that very little of it is Tobias’, most belonging to the two police officers Tobias killed, as well as some of Will’s own.

“I just killed two men. The FBI came to question me about the killer.”

Neither man in the memory catches it but Doctor Lecter sways back slightly at the words. Will realizes then that he had sent Will straight to Budge in the hopes of having Will kill him. Lecter must, at this moment, think that Will died in Tobias’s store.

Will is so distracted watching Lecter that it takes a moment for him to realize that the man is lazily trying to convince Franklyn to leave while he blabbers on about Tobias feeling guilty. He sees the moment Lecter breaks just seconds before he steps forward and snaps Franklyn’s neck, face ominously devoid of emotion.

Tobias grimaces. “I was looking forward to that.”

“I know.” Tobias seemingly took something of Lecter’s so it’s only fair he take something of Tobias’s.

Doctor Lecter launches an attack and Tobias retaliates with an unraveled piano string he pulls from his pocket. The wire shreds into Lecter’s coat, drawing blood. Will watches, transfixed.

Lecter closes the distance, using his open palm to strike Tobias in the chest and knock him back. Tobias catches his arm and twists, Hannibal using his momentum against Tobias and knocking him onto his desk, feet in front of Will.

Hannibal leaps over the desk, following as Tobias retreats to the other side of it. Tobias stumbles and finds arms locked around his throat in a stranglehold. His arms flail, trying to push Hannibal off or find something to defend himself with. His hand lands on the scalpel that started this memory.

He digs the scalpel into Hannibal’s hand, using the distraction to create distance between them. He edges toward the ladder. Hannibal slips an object into his sleeve as he follows, dodging swipes with the scalpel while closing the distance between them.

Tobias catches Hannibal’s shoulder with the scalpel, merely a glance, but Hannibal uses the opportunity to pull the object from his sleeve and slice Tobias from elbow to wrist. The ballpoint pen in Hannibal’s grasp, now covered in blood, quickly darts out to jap Tobias in the throat. He’s stopped at the last moment as Tobias catches him in the carotid artery with a swift punch.

Tobias darts forward to tackle Hannibal against the ladder, their limbs flying in every direction as they fall back. Hannibal recovers first and pulls one of Tobias’s arms through the gap between rungs and snaps it. Tobias collapses to the floor, crying in agony.

Blood drips from his wounds as Hannibal climbs shakily to his feet, stumbling to his metal stag statue. He carefully picks it up with his pocket square and lifts it high over Tobias’s head. It crunches sickeningly as it crushes bone and brain, instantly ending the fight. Hannibal tips over the statue’s pedestal.

Adrenaline rushes through Will's veins, the satisfaction of a battle well-won coursing through his bloodstream. Distantly, he knows he did not kill Tobias, but he has settled so comfortably into Hannibal's mindset that it feels odd to acknowledge. As Hannibal flops into his desk chair and delicately picks up the phone to call Jack, Will's satisfaction is cut through by overwhelming exhaustion. Not physical, of course, but the tiredness that comes with losing something important to you.

Will sinks out of Hannibal's head as he realizes he was beginning to mourn his own fake passing. It's comforting to know that Hannibal suffered because of his actions, even if he doesn't seem to regret the decision to send Will to Tobias itself. *Weeding out the unfit, though it's a shock to realize he was unfit.* He knows the thought isn't his own, doesn't mind it for what it reveals about Hann– *Doctor Lecter* .

He wonders when he slipped and started thinking of Doctor Lecter as Hannibal as he fades into wakefulness again.

He avoids the more intense memories for a while, instead sticking to childhood memories of games with Mischa or reliving his appointments with Doctor Lecter and analyzing them from an outside perspective.

A week after an ear is dropped off at his trial and said ear's owner is located and the judge of his trial is found empty-headed, Will is escorted from his cell to the private meeting cells by the odd orderly he's been trying to ignore. Instead of leaving, the orderly lingers, circling Will like a vulture.

No , he realizes as their eyes accidentally meet for a moment, *like a hawk* . He doesn't quite know why the orderly startled the thought from him but he feels great discomfort knowing that the comparison would please him if he knew.

"You were inside the FBI. That's talent. If you hadn't gotten sick, they would've never found you," Will tunes back in at that, frustrated that he doesn't seem to plan on leaving any time soon.

Before, the orderly, *Matthew Brown* , only seemed the type to rub elbows with serial killers for the thrill of it, like seeing like but never having the need to push him that final step. Now, though, Will is certain this man has killed, maybe many people. Not those deserving of his

wrath, like the ones Will would prey on—not that he would, he reminds himself—or the type to earn Doctor Lecter's wrath. No, Matthew Brown is the kind of killer that Will would take great pleasure in hunting down, normally. He doesn't feel too normal now, surrounded by metal bars and clad in the sad blue jumpsuit that signifies the BSHCI's claim on him.

"You chose a great place to hide."

Matthew doesn't seem to pick up on his sarcasm by the way the corners of his lips struggle not to twitch into a giddy smile. Good. "If you spend time in a mental hospital, you pick up the drill. You could pass as an orderly, get a job doing it when you get out. They may never suspect you were ever in."

Will's eyebrow creeps up. "You realize Chilton records everything said in this room."

"Who do you think wired the mic? Or unwired it, as it is now?"

"You killed the bailiff."

"That I did. Read up on your file, thought it might exonerate you. Easy to recreate your work, at that point."

"And the judge?"

"I shot the bailiff, someone else got the judge. You seem to have accumulated quite the collection of admirers," Matthew chirps, proud of Will's apparent infamy. "You ever see the way smaller birds will mob a hawk on a wire? You and me are like hawks, Mr. Graham." His deference sets off alarm bells in his head, the few that hadn't been ringing before now.

Matthew wants something from him, but he isn't quite sure what, yet. He is certain that it will be presented as a service to Will, one that benefits Matthew just as much. So he sits back, listens to Matthew's spiel about loneliness and pack hunting, hoping all the while he gets to the point soon.

His wishes are granted as Matthew extends his… services to Will. Will has no plans to kill Doctor Lecter now, especially when he doesn't know if his death will put an end to Will's nightly explorations. But, he has another use for Matthew.

"I want you to spy on Doctor Lecter for me. No killing, not unless I explicitly tell you to. But I want you to follow him around when you can, just for a few weeks as a test run. I want to know who he meets with, where he goes, and when. Report back to me. If I get results, I might reward you."

Matthew's eyes gleam in excitement. "Reward? And what results are you looking for?"

Will's lips tick up in a fake smile. "That's on a need-to-know basis, and you don't need to know." Matthew looks like he wants to object but he pauses, taking in Will's demeanor. He nods, jerkily.

"Follow him around, report back to you. Got it. Anything else you want me to do?" Hope flickers in his eyes.

Will feels nothing but pity for him, like watching an ant struggle to bring back a crumb to appease the queen. He's so desperate for approval and recognition he's practically kneeling at Will's feet. "I'll give you a head's up if there is. For now, just this." He pauses, considering. "Thank you, Matthew, this means a *lot* to me," Will smiles darkly, turning his glee at the unexpected opportunity into pretend satisfaction with Matthew, who preens.

He scurries off as the time for Will's scheduled therapy session creeps closer, likely to fix the audio in the therapy room so when Chilton inevitably decides to boost his ego by replaying his conversations with Will over and over again, he suspects nothing.

Will is only able to spend a few minutes knee-deep in his stream before the overly loud click of Chilton's cane echoes through the room, alerting Will of the man's inevitable interruption. Will is certain that Chilton has some sort of fancy tack stuck to the bottom of his cane so it draws as much attention to him as possible.

Chilton settles into a lean, supported against his cane as he stands just on the edge of the line outside of Will's cage.

"The FBI is convinced that the man at the center of the Mural was the killer himself and that someone else had implanted him into his own creation. Do you have anything to say about that?"

"Frederick, this feigned ignorance isn't cute. We both know you listen in on as many of my conversations as possible. I want to make a proposition."

"You're hardly in a place to proposition me for anything, especially when you want something in return."

"I am quite the topic of conversation in psychiatric circles."

Chilton scoffs. "I shared my diagnosis of you on the witness stand. Your personality disorders, neuroses, all forgeries."

"Even if that were true, I'd still be a psychopath of some interest, don't you think? Imagine, a book of your own, containing the single look into the mind of *the* Will Graham, your word the end-all-be-all of knowledge about the most curious case study this century."

"You'll spend the rest of your life in here with me. I'll get what I want from you inevitably."

"Either I'm a psychopath or I'm delusional. Or, I'm right about the Chesapeake Ripper still being loose."

"The killer you claimed your previous psychiatrist was only a handful of months ago? Whom you suddenly stopped pointing the finger incessantly at? Will you allow me to test you?"

“Thematic Apperception. Minnesota Multiphasic. I’ll take them all. But you’d have to keep everything I tell you secret from all your psychiatry groupies, at least until your New York Times Best Seller publishes. Even from Hannibal Lecter.”

“You’re a common point of interest for the both of us. He’ll want to know why I can’t discuss you and why he can’t see you.”

Will’s eyebrow raises. Does he seriously have to guide Chilton through the intricacies of telling Hannibal Lecter to fuck off, hold the man’s hand every step of the way? Will comforts himself by imagining the intricate tableau Doctor Lecter could make of him.

“Tell him I refused to talk in therapy so you confined me to solitary out of spite. He’d believe that. Or, better yet, tell him that I’m refusing to talk to anyone. If it sweetens the deal you can make that true. You’d be my only contact with the outside world, I’d depend on you for information.”

Chilton practically sways forward in excitement. “You’d be reliant on me to keep from slipping—further—into desperate insanity. You might just have a deal, Mr. Graham. We can begin next week, I have some important business to attend to.” He turns to address the random orderly that had taken Matthew Brown’s place for the meeting. “You! Bring him back to his cell.”

Matthew swoops back in from the hallway to assist the other orderly. Will is escorted back to his cell, Matthew winking at him from an angle hidden both from the cameras and the second orderly lingering in the background. Will settles into his stream to wait out the rest of the day.

Chapter End Notes

Just in case you didn't pick it up because I added it very last minute in editing earlier chapters, most of Bev and Will's conversations occur in those lil private cages. I don't know how she accomplished it, maybe she threatened to arrest Chilton for obstructing justice to get her way

Calla lilies, the flowers on the doorknobs, symbolize magnificence and beauty.

I've Got No Scents, No Scents At All

Chapter Summary

Matthew Brown's investigation finally bears some fruit, though not in a way Will or Matthew expected. The Ripper rips again.

Chapter Notes

The chapter title is an adapted quote from OTGW again! Since the original line was a play on words, I thought this might be fun too... It'll make more sense when you read it, I promise!
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For the first time since the Muralist case was, in all ways except officially, closed, Doctor Lecter visits him. This is, of course, a direct contradiction to his agreement with Chilton. But when has he ever followed instructions, even when it might benefit him?

Will approaches the bars at the same time as his visitor, hands settling onto the bars. “Surprised that Chilton let you see me. Said I was no longer your patient, under his exclusive care.”

Doctor Lecter’s head tilts to the side, face not conveying any emotion. “I’m afraid I had to insist. Chilton accused me of using unorthodox therapies on you during our conversations. He suggested that I induced fake memories. Where would he get that idea from?”

“Chilton gave me a narcoanalytic,” Will whispers as he presses his torso against the bars. “But it felt like it was more than that. It felt like a hypnotic. Midazolam or Temazepam.”

He closes his eyes, rests his forehead against the cool metal. Though it happened a week ago he can still feel the chill of the Lithuanian winter air biting at his nose, the warmth of broth in his stomach, and the tender meat between his teeth as Chilton clumsily directs him into his

subconscious. He shudders at the combination of euphoria and disgust that drips down his spine like sludge, sticky and difficult to shake off.

“Hypnotics that alter perception and render you easily suggestible.” Will can see the glimmer of curiosity that lights in Hannibal’s maroon eyes. He can so easily picture the remembered euphoria and disgust in that gaze.

“Frederick thinks I uncovered false memories, or at least ones I shouldn’t have been able to experience. Apparently, Abigail’s teeth would’ve been too big for them to have been the little ones gleaming up at me.” It takes Will’s entire being not to madly grin at the minute flinch that twitches through Hannibal. No one else would have noticed the movement, disguised as a blink as it was, but Will knows Hannibal. He couldn’t have hid it if he tried.

“What an odd scene to recollect, especially falsely. What does Chilton think I have to do with that?”

“I think that he thinks that you are an accomplice to my alleged crimes. Or that I confided in you and used doctor-patient confidentiality to keep your lips sealed. That you created false memories to cover up the gaps left by the ones you hid, the ones where I killed my victims so I could more effectively play the insanity card.

“Such a wild imagination, and yet once again, he seems to have missed the mark by a long shot, poor Frederick.”

“Certainty will be found with those who care about you, not those who condemned you as a psychopath.”

You’ve never condemned me. You’ve always been my friend.”

Hannibal only smiles, a small but genuine upward twitch of the lips.

“What’s to be done about dreadful old Frederick, though? His allegations would cause much more of a fuss for the both of us.”

~

For the next handful of weeks, Matthew finds excuses every few days to pull Will back to the therapy hall early before his daily meeting with Chilton.

Mostly, his reports are boring: “The Good Doc went swimming in this fancy gym pool wearing the *tiniest* little swim shorts. Surprisingly fit, for a shrink.”

“Drove an unreasonably long time just to buy the oddest assortment of foreign spices he could get his hands on.”

“Lecter’s got appointments from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., then lunch, then appointments again until 6 on Monday through Wednesday, but he stays in the office ‘til nearly 9 on Thursday, though he doesn’t have any appointments that I can see. Paperwork, probably, but I don’t wanna get too close lest I tip him off and ruin the fun too soon.”

But on the third week, Matthew drags him to the therapy hall almost giddy.

“Mr. Graham, you’re not gonna believe this! The Good Doctor has a secret house. It was difficult to follow him there without him noticing, had to follow him up there a few times from different locations up and down the road, even switching cars a few times! But the location, a great view from the cliff, by the way, looks like it might be the place where he meets a secret family or something.

Most often, I’ve seen some teenage-ish girl there, but sometimes a blonde lady shows up at the dinner table too. She looks a little young for him, *maybe* 15 years older than the girl, but who am I to judge?”

Will’s eyebrows shoot up. The girl is obviously…. Abigail, but the woman he isn’t sure about at first. He knows Bedelia, Lecter’s ex-psychiatrist, is blonde, but he can’t imagine that she’d manage to look younger than Will from afar.

Then it clicks. The woman is Miriam Lass, alive nearly three years after her disappearance. “Good, good. Keep this up. See if you can break into the place when he’s not there. Preferably the day after his next visit. Don’t let anyone catch you.”

Matthew nods, scurrying off when the sound of Chilton’s cane echoes down the hallway toward them. Now that Will knows what to look for better, he can check on Abigail when he falls asleep. He needs to know if Hannibal really has kept her alive, and why. First, he’s forced to comply with his side of the agreement with Chilton.

He’s set up at his usual table, with a polygraph set up in front of him and a cart carrying an assortment of barely legal drugs settles on his left. Handcuffs lock his hands in place, in sight of the guards but out of the way, leaving his arm exposed for any injections Chilton decides are important to their meeting today.

Chilton saunters in, rests his cane against the cart, and sits all too pompously into the plastic folding chair across the table from Will. “Which shall we try today: memory recovery or an honest conversation?”

“Every conversation I’ve had with you is as honest as I can make it. I can do little to quell the invasive personality that’s been messing with our affairs. I want *it* gone as much as you do.”

Chilton leans forward, hanging onto Will’s every word. “And you believe this personality is Hannibal Lecter’s influence? You seem confident it isn’t your influence on him that’s causing conflicts. If you’d just let him confess to what you’d told him, we’d all be much better off.”

Will sighs. “You see, Frederick? We’re just going in circles, have been for the past few weeks. I tell you that Doctor Lecter’s influenced me into doing— *seeing*— things that I can’t for the life of me get a grip on. You twist my words and say I’ve convinced him to become my unwitting accomplice. We end up right back where we started.”

“We could try more hypnosis,” Chilton suggests, practically salivating onto his tacky suit at the thought.

Will internally cringes. He *could* agree to it, just to see if this time one of his own memories will resurface, but the threat of recalling one of Hannibal's, and from his perspective instead of Will's own, leaves him hesitating.

"You thought Abel Gideon was the Chesapeake Ripper, believed it so hard you convinced the man himself. I don't feel comfortable giving you full reign over my mental faculties. And you're still in the doghouse for letting Doctor Lecter see me again. If you care so much about what he has to say, why don't you just ask him yourself?"

Chilton's pathetic attempt at covering up his overt interest in that idea would have been enough to convince Will he was clueless, and a terrible actor, to boot, if he hadn't already suffered through all too many interactions to alert him to this fact beforehand. He can practically see Chilton stumbling, drunk on excitement, to seek out Hannibal's expertise, and the hand that would shape him into something better. Will tries not to feel such unrestrained glee at what he's started.

He doesn't try too hard.

~

That night, he wanders the familiar route back to the room with the 'family' dinner. He skips the actual dinner, preferring to slip through the partially open door into Abigail's bedroom.

He notices that the bathroom door is closed, unlike last time. The painted white wood barely creaks as he swings it open. The room behind this one is similar to Abigail's room in Baltimore, if only in color. Somehow larger than the first version, this new bedroom has a sprawling floor-to-ceiling window that spans one entire wall. From beyond it, he can see a cliff leading out to the ocean.

Movement from the corner of the room catches his eye and he notices Abigail hunched over a laptop at the desk. Her hair is tied into a loose but complicated braid that falls over her shoulder, revealing both the edge of her scar and the floral pattern of the cardigan she wears.

The door opens again, this time in the memory, and Abigail glances over her shoulder to wave at the intruder. “Hi, Hannibal! I’ve been looking at universities in France like you suggested. The earth sciences program at Paris-Saclay looks interesting. See, I’ve got this spreadsheet covering my top colleges’ tuition, programs, international student support systems, that sort of thing. And–And I’ve been practicing my French outside of our lessons.” She points at an orange sticky note on the desk’s lamp, labeling it in French.

Doctor Lecter, sitting on the small green sofa next to the desk, nods. He smiles in that way that’s less a smile and more a gleam in his eyes and a squint. “And your Italian? We can’t be sure that we’ll stay in France too long; it’s important to have a backup plan or two.”

Abigail fiddles with the button of her cardigan. “I’ve been… preoccupied with France. But can you blame me? I mean, before the *incident* , I hadn’t left Minnesota! Soon, I’ll be living in Europe, France, or Italy, or Ireland. I’ll focus more on Italian though, I promise. Only if you keep me updated on how the plan is going.”

Doctor Lecter picks off a piece of nonexistent lint from the knee of his maroon suit. For a moment, Will thinks it’s just paisley, but a closer look reveals that its pattern resembles that of pressed leaves on barely-visible black silk. As always, he looks devastatingly handsome, seemingly effortlessly.

“You are aware that I killed the judge so that Will’s case would have to go through a retrial, since the bailiff’s murder couldn’t be attributed to the Chesapeake Ripper, at least in a court of law. So I’d been planning the logistics behind a tableau for Sheldon Isley, the city councilman. I do wonder though, now, our Dear Will’s own manipulations.”

Abigail quirks an eyebrow at him.

“He wants me to target Dr. Frederick Chilton.”

“And you want to do it.” It’s not a question and none of them pretend it is.

“Dreadfully so. Curious that I am aware of his manipulations and yet I can feel them working, even as we speak. He wields my freedom like a pistol and wishes to use me to exact

his revenge for him."

"Will you? Kill the doctor for Will?" Abigail's nose twitches. She has more she wants to say but holds her tongue, for some reason that Will can't figure out.

Hannibal sighs. It's so… human of a gesture that it startles Will and simultaneously makes him feel odd, he's disgruntled to realize the emotion is contentedness.

"He's been… less cold to me, in our more recent discussions. I had resigned myself to having to deal with his ire for a while as a consequence of encouraging his Becoming, but I find myself hoping that this change will continue."

"And the best opportunity at the moment is to go along with his request." Abigail thinks for a moment then smirks. "You sap."

Hannibal stands up, leaning over to pat Abigail on the shoulder and she leans into the gesture, almost imperceptibly. "I will not. I've come up with bigger plans for Dr. Chilton, which I hope will be enough to satisfy dear Will. I'm going to frame him for the Ripper's crimes, with a little help from our friend, Miss Lass."

Will shudders at the realization. He imagines the indignities he's faced over the last few months all weighing on Chilton's shoulders. His awfully patterned suits, his pretentious-but-inedible appetite, his social circles all stripped from him in the blink of an eye. Hannibal would do that for him, all because he asked for something terrible to befall the (not so) good doctor. It isn't exactly what he had meant, but it's much more than he had expected to get.

Not only will he, possibly very soon, be exonerated by the resurfacing of the Chesapeake Ripper, but the man who actively tormented Will the most since he'd been imprisoned will also get the blame for it.

Will is startled out of his thoughts by Abigail chirping "You're aware there's some guy that's been following you, yeah? Recently, he's started inspecting the house when you're gone. I always hide when he does, but I watch him." Her blue eyes blink up at Hannibal, who now leans with one hip resting against the doorframe.

“I’ve been aware for weeks. He stays a good distance away, always out of sight. But I can smell him.”

Abigail splutters. “Huh? What, does he smell bad or do you have a super sniffer or what?”

“Super sniffer isn’t how I’d phrase it, but I’ve had an exceptionally strong sense of smell my whole life. As a child, I often was overwhelmed until I learned to manage it. By the time I was a medical doctor I was able to diagnose more common afflictions by scent alone with relative confidence. I could smell Will’s encephalitis well before it grew beyond headaches and the occasional nightmare.”

Will wants to be enraged by that realization. But the realization does little to dim the warm feeling that he’s been filled with for the past few minutes. Mostly, he’s glad that he had someone monitoring his health to such an extent; Hannibal would have known the second his encephalitis had grown to be a genuine threat to not just his health but his life. He may be at a higher risk of developing complications the next time he gets the flu, but he was never fated to die in a hospital, convinced that he was going insane.

Abigail unsuccessfully hides a chuckle by covering her mouth with her hand. “You’re *weird* weird, huh? Well, I guess we all are. A cannibal at 17, a neurotic soon-to-be serial killer with hyper-empathy, and a serial killer with a penchant for cannibalism and identifying diseases with an exceedingly strong sense of smell. We fit right in with each other because we don’t fit in anywhere else.”

Hannibal grins at that, honest and showing off his crooked teeth endearingly. He taps the desk with one finger. “You should get back to your work. Remember, focus on Italian as much as your French.”

“Sir, yessir!” Abigail salutes at him before swiveling her chair back to face her laptop. Unbeknownst to her, Hannibal watches her for a moment longer with a faint smile on his face before he shuts the door.

A fleeting thought that he should warn Matthew that Hannibal is onto him crosses his mind before he brushes it aside. He wonders with a morbid curiosity just what Hannibal will do to

this perceived threat to their family.

Abigail and her laptop eventually fizzle out of existence and Will heads back through the door he came through. He feels awkward trying the door which obviously leads to the en suite bathroom so he settles on using the hallway to get to the next memory.

The door is an almost perfect replica of the one that leads to Hannibal's kitchen, with the only difference being the trumpet-shaped flowers with long stems that branch out from the base of the doorknob. Will isn't certain since it has been nearly a decade since he took a botany class but he thinks they're supposed to be amaryllis.

The doorknob is warm under his hand like someone else has opened the door recently. The wood almost hums under his touch. Will wonders what that means, both in regards to the memory or memories contained behind the door and Hannibal himself. Like every door before it that leads to one of Hannibal's residences, this door swings open silently.

Unsurprisingly, Will finds himself in the kitchen again. He lets the door close behind him and that seems to start the next memory. As soon as the handle leaves his grasp it swings outward again and Will jumps out of the way to avoid the door and the person behind it, though he isn't certain either would be able to touch him.

Abigail slips into the kitchen just as silently as Will had just moments prior. To his left at the island, Hannibal fizzles into existence like an old-timey sci-fi hologram. He faces away from the door, slicing an assortment of vegetables thinly. Despite making no noise, Hannibal is alerted to Abigail's presence somehow and stops slicing to glance over his shoulder at her.

"Hello, Abigail. Would you like to help? I've nearly finished with the red peppers if you want to blend them while I move onto dicing the onion."

She nods, humming in confirmation, and settles beside him. She observes as he pours the slices of red pepper and scotch bonnet pepper into a bowl that already has a small, sliced onion in it. It's obvious by the way she glances repeatedly over at Hannibal from where she's moved to the blender that she has something she wants to say.

Apparent enough that Hannibal also notices, at least. “You know you are allowed to speak freely in this household, Abigail. Though you may take all the time you need.” He scrapes the diced onion into a large pot with oil already simmering in it.

“What’re you making?”

“ *We* are making Efo Riro, a Nigerian stew which roughly translates to ‘stirred leafy vegetable,’ a reference to the primary ingredient, spinach. Spinach and a protein, typically crayfish, served in a pepper sauce and often accompanied by fufu.” At Abigail’s curious look, he adds “Fufu is a general name for side dishes meant to be swallowed without chewing, aptly named swallows. Today, I’ve made pounded yams.”

Abigail nods, intrigued. “And it’s one of those meals eaten with your hands?” She holds her hands up in front of her, wiggling her fingers for emphasis.

“Yes. I feel that acknowledging both the culture and history behind every dish I prepare is incredibly important. I will help you figure it out when we settle down for dinner. Hand me the peppers now, thank you.” He stirs the sauce with one hand as he gestures to a small bowl on the counter with his other. “Give that locust bean a smell, would you please? It’s rather aromatic so if you don’t like it much then I can leave it out today.”

Abigail does as he says, picking up the bowl and holding it a few inches from her face. Her nose scrunches for a moment, then she pulls it back farther. “It really is strong! I don’t think it’s bad, though, and there’s a lot of stew in comparison to how little of this there is.” She sets the bowl back on the counter, nudging it back from the edge when it ends up sticking off of it a little.

They work in silence for a few minutes, Hannibal having Abigail hand him ingredients once in a while so he can add them to the pot. Eventually, she speaks up again.

“I want to help you with Isley. I looked into his politics and stuff recently, he’s a real—pardon my language—asshole. I want to help.” She twiddles her thumbs together, pointedly not looking in Hannibal’s direction.

“You resent your father for the way he forced your hand. I will not have that happen again, not with me.”

“I wouldn’t resent you! You aren’t making me do anything I don’t want, you’ve helped me understand what it is that I want in the first place! I’m asking to help you, what better way to learn than from experience?” Abigail’s blue eyes light up with her passion as she pleads her case, hands gripping a tea towel as a clutch.

Will walks around the counter to get a good look at Hannibal’s face. He can see how unexpected this is for him but also sees the proud glimmer in his eyes that he hides from Abigail by adding the blanched spinach to the pot. Hannibal sighs for effect, glancing at Abigail as he concedes, “I suppose if you really want to, there’s no harm in allowing it. You must choose how involved in this process you will be, I can only guide you on how to carry out your justice in the most effective manner.”

Abigail nods furiously. “Yes, yes, thank you, Hannibal! I won’t let you down, I promise.”

“I don’t see how you could, given that I have no expectations for how you should proceed. No matter how much or little you decide to be involved, in the end, I can only be glad for the efforts you’ve made toward developing yourself this way, ” Hannibal admits. He abruptly pulls away from the stove as Abigail’s arms wrap around his torso suddenly.

She buries her face into his chest, murmuring something too quietly for Will to hear. Hannibal only strokes her hair to comfort her.

Eventually, she pulls away. Her eyes glisten, although she hasn’t cried. “It’s not murder if nothing goes to waste, and art is never a waste. Though, we will eat some of him, right?”

Her chipper tone discussing something so grim makes a small part of Will recoil, a much smaller part than it really ought to be. Though, when it comes to Abigail, he’s always found it difficult to feel repulsed by anything she’s said or done. He ignores the whisper that says that the same applies to Hannibal.

Hannibal hums in agreement. “We, or I, will empty his chest cavity, rob him of most of his organs, and replace them with an assortment of poisonous plants. I have been cultivating the root growth of a cherry blossom tree in a cabin in Virginia, which he is currently tied to.

We'll leave only the lungs, which will eventually be used to point the BAU in Chilton's direction."

"Will will be out soon?" Abigail asks, hopeful.

Hannibal smiles. "Quite. And, in his place, Frederick will bear the title of the Chesapeake Ripper. Jack should be satisfied with that, and Will will be one step closer to being ours."

A shudder runs down Will's spine. Not even three months ago those words would fill Will with a convoluted mixture of dread, anger, and disgust. Now, he finds he can only manage a sigh of relief that his days in the BSHCI truly are numbered. It shouldn't take more than two weeks for the first tableau to drop and send the FBI scrambling to find the 'real' Ripper. Maybe five 'til the courts officially release him, if Jack can do his job right.

Soon, the memory is fizzling out of existence as Hannibal carries their plates through the door to the dining room. As it does, the black haze that precedes wakefulness settles in the edges of his vision. He settles for idling the time away with another memory of one of their sessions until he wakes up.

Conspicuously, Matthew doesn't show up to work for his next shift. Or the next, or the next.

It takes four days for the body to drop. Jack comes to see him on the way back from the crime scene.

"Surgical precision, organ removal, body posed before rigor mortis set, it checks almost all the boxes," he huffs, pacing like a caged lion in front of Will's cell. Will has to bite back the snarky comment that threatens to burst from his lips at the irony.

"Almost. What's missing?"

"The organs were removed post mortem. That's big. That means it's not him, right? You're still…" He trails off.

“Still what Jack? Still the scapegoat? Who the hell was it, anyway? You haven’t given me the file, I’m assuming you wanted to tell me directly.”

Jack sighs, his pacing losing momentum. “You assume right. The vic is an employee here, Matthew Brown? He worked in this ward often, did he ever…” he trails off.

“Ever what, Jack? Do anything to imply that he might be a future Ripper victim? Tell me he had a chat with him and discussed what weather is best for serial murder?”

“Ever do anything that suggested that he was stalking anyone?”

Will sighs. “Jack, he was an orderly in my section, we didn’t have weekly sleepovers. If he was stalking anyone, he didn’t tell me about it.”

Jack finally slides the case file through the gap in Will’s cell. He flips the folder open, eyes absorbing the first crime scene photo.

Matthew’s body is strung up, arms tied to a wooden pole like a crucifixion scene. His wrists are slit, blood drying where it trickled down his arms to the floor. The most shocking aspect is the gaping chasm that used to be his abdominal cavity; a y-incision carves him open and follows the path of a jagged knife wound that slides up his stomach. The flaps of skin on either side of him dangle loosely, revealing that his heart is missing.

Will’s eyes slide shut and he slips into the killer’s mind without hesitation.

I sneak up on him; he knows I am here but he doesn’t know my exact location. Doesn’t know that he is the prey and not I. I purposefully shift my foot to a creaky floorboard and he swings around to face me. He barely realizes who I am before I slide the knife into his torso, forcing the knife up but leaving the wound as shallow as possible.

I would hate to damage the meat. He doesn't need it as much as we want it.

The scene shifts.

I had lain in wait behind him and now that he's incapacitated I can step in. I carry him to the table, lay him on it, dodging his arms which weakly try to fend us off. The familiar feel of the nitrile gloves I slide on feels equally like slipping into a warm bath and getting out of a restrictive hold, comforting and relaxing.

He pleads at us, not for mercy as usual but for us to relay his message. The one that never was seen. I am more than willing to allow this change of plans.

I grab a scalpel from my tools and continue the work that has already begun. The blood loss from the initial wound has slowed his heart rate too much; he will not live to feel me spread his ribs. He will provide us with his heart, a gift for the one who belongs in ours. He will be honored in the way he deserves; this is not our ideal but his. A fledgling killer such as himself has earned the right to that much.

When his breath has stuttered to a halt and his heart has been removed and stored, I transport him to the location. It's fitting this boy be found at the location of his final kill; his efforts finally bear the fruits of his labor.

He is hanged, arms out. I slit his wrists and no blood falls. His heart is no longer pumping, not even in place to do so, but we promised to relay his idea to the masses. Instead, I use some of the spare blood from previous kills, ones attributed to the Copycat. To wrap up the display and leave the FBI frantic, I hang some of the photos he had taken of me up, as well as some planted ones of our scapegoat.

This is our design.

Will has never analyzed a crime scene created by two so drastically different individuals; not many serial killers work together and, when they do, they're often so in sync it's not much different from looking at it as one individual.

This, though, is very obviously the work of two individuals who are working together for convenience. Though they have a goal in mind, they seem to want the same effect to come about in vastly different ways. They killed together because they wanted to, but they likely will not kill together for long, or will only meet for this unusual partnership for special occasions. Much like taking a holiday, these killers may eventually come together again to shake things up, but once this initial internship of sorts reaches its completion they will primarily work alone, or at least not together.

The first killer craves independence, the freedom that comes with killing as she wants to; the second kills because he knows it is his duty to shape the unworthy into beatific presentations of violence, because it pleases him to deify himself by reshaping his victims to such an extent.

He does not tell Jack this. This moment, one so intimate as the opportunity to teach a successor such an art form, will stay between the three of them. Instead, he says: "Matth–the victim was following these two, obviously. But he wasn't just following them because he planned to kill one, or both, of them, although that was a footnote in his plans. He suspected them of being the Ripper.

He was hunting him, he wanted to absorb the strength of the Ripper into himself through a display like this. The real Ripper just caught him before he could carry out that plan. The Ripper admired his tenacity, to some extent. He wanted to show that Matthew was right about one thing: the Ripper is still loose and nothing will stop him. The Ripper honored him by displaying him like Matthew wanted to display him while also shaming him for being so reckless as to get caught. This is simultaneously a reward and a punishment."

And the heart?" Jack questions. "Why take the heart if this is a reward? Which of them is the Ripper?"

Will sighs, rubbing his eyes with a shaky hand and undoubtedly bringing up Jack's old memories of Will analyzing crime scenes before his imprisonment when he seemed like a more trustworthy opinion.

"Matthew idolized the Ripper, had given his heart to him metaphorically ages ago. The Ripper was only taking what is rightfully his. In regards to *who* the Ripper is, ask yourself

who would benefit most from framing me, locking me up here. Lecter was my friend, Chilton is my jailor."

Jack takes this in for a moment. He seems to have come to a conclusion of some kind because he nods. "If this is the Ripper, I don't know what this means for you. Whatever happens, know that I appreciate your assistance and… if you did do those things, I don't believe you'd done them when you were sound of mind. If I could go back and change the way I handled things…" he trails off.

Will knows that even if Jack found out who the Ripper was, he likely wouldn't change anything that happened. His white whale was worth the sacrifices, too important to risk undoing the discovery to avoid being the catalyst for Will's inevitable imprisonment. He doesn't fault Jack; he doesn't himself know if he would risk losing access to Hannibal's mind palace to avoid getting locked in the BSHCI. He wishes he thought differently.

He nods farewell to Jack, is pleased with the idea of not having to decide whether to explicitly point in Hannibal's direction now that he's stopped doing so or to frame Chilton and let the real Ripper—and Abigail—go free. He wonders if Hannibal will invite him for dinner when he gets out of here.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so excited to be drawing the BSHCI arc to an end, not much longer 'til these dumbasses get their act together. Now also features the last time Will consistently forces himself to think of Hannibal as Doctor Lecter. Unless he's mad, which is a headcanon I am a BIG fan of.
You can find some amazing chefs who focus on West African cuisine on Instagram! @veghanaian and @thecanadianafrican focus on vegan Ghanan dishes, while @theblvckgourmet also has dishes with meat products.
Amaryllis symbolizes self-confidence and pride, the self-confidence being Abigail's own and the pride being Hannibal's pride in Abigail's progress.

Everything I say Comes Out In Someone Else's Voice

Chapter Summary

> Will continues to sow distrust of Chilton in his FBI friends and explores a new method of visiting Hannibal's memory palace.

Chapter Notes

> The chapter title is from Oh No by Four Eyes. Although the alternative theme is Conent to be Slightly Forlorn, which IS from OTGW, like all the rest
> Little warning! If you don't like reading about puking, then skip the first paragraph after Chilton and Will's therapy session. There are a few references to it beyond that in the rest of that scene, but none of it is very graphic so if it doesn't bother you too much you shouldn't worry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Not long after Jack visits does Bev stop by too. It’s purely case stuff so she sticks to settling herself into a foldable chair set outside of his cell.

“Jack said you thought the vic was hunting the Ripper. I don’t know about hunting yet but he was definitely obsessed.” She holds up a photo of a scrapbook, filled to bursting with newspaper clippings and printouts of online articles about the Ripper.

“We also found evidence that points to him being the one who killed the bailiff and sent an ear to you at your trial. A little digging revealed that before he worked here he had spent the last decade jumping from psych ward to psych ward across the east coast. Sometimes, he’d get released quickly for good behavior and land right back in another one, sometimes he had to be transferred for endangering other patients. I don’t know how he managed to get a job here in the first place.”

Will glances at the cameras. “I heard the guy running this place is a little lax on safety efforts.”

Bev snorts at that. “One thing is certain: this guy was stalking Lecter and Chilton and *somehow* the killer found out.”

Will takes one look at her slightly raised eyebrows and the angle of her shoulders—away from the cameras, keeping this between them—and knows she suspects one of the shrinks Matthew was allegedly stalking of being the Chesapeake Ripper.

“The Ripper’ll let you get close and make it virtually impossible to tell which of them is him. He will blur the lines between framed and framer, and never give you enough evidence to let you convict,” Will presses his body to the bars as he lowers his voice, making it as difficult as possible for the microphones to pick his voice up.

“So, you’re saying the Ripper will intentionally point evidence his way, just to flip the script and shift the focus to the other guy? How do we catch him?”

“The Chesapeake Ripper, as intelligent and manipulative as he is, is still a man. Fallible, he might slip up. Or, he’ll get sick of hiding and lure you just close enough that you can get him. The Ripper kills with such theatricality because he loves the infamy he’s received; he views this as equal to the adoration bestowed upon humanity’s greats: Michelangelo, Khalo, O’Keefe, their styles recognizable to the general public long beyond their deaths. He might just decide to put a face to the name.”

Beverly nods. “There’s gotta be a reason he’s coming out of retirement after framing you, right? It makes sense that he’d let you free if it meant receiving the credit he feels he’s due.” She shuffles the papers in the file into a neat stack before closing the folder again, standing up with a groan. “Looks like I’ve got some research to do. See ya later, Will.”

Will waves goodbye. He hopes that Hannibal will keep Beverly from digging her own grave.

~

Eventually, he can't keep denying Chilton another hypnotherapy session. He agrees mostly because he's curious about whether he'll reveal another of Hannibal's memories or if this time he'll actually uncover one of his repressed memories.

The drugs feel cold when the assistant injects him with them. He can imagine their syrupy flow through his bloodstream so well he tricks himself into feeling it. He shivers.

Chilton grins at him smugly from across the table. "You just couldn't ignore the temptation any longer, huh? Had to come crawling back to me for my help. Well, I suppose I can do just that." He shifts in his seat, barely noticeable but Will knows his old injuries still give him trouble. "Just relax, breathe in and out."

His voice fades into the background somewhat as the drugs kick in and Will settles into a deep calm, unlike last time, where he had been antsy as Chilton droned on, which is what Will suspects to be the primary cause of the terrifying perspective of the memory he had slipped into. Now, though, relaxation seeps into his very bones and he struggles to keep fully upright in his chair.

"Did Hannibal Lecter ever administer any drug therapies during your sessions together?" Chilton continues to drone on but Will's sluggish brain latches onto the most recognizable part of the sentence.

Hannibal. Hannibal Lecter. Mentally, he stretches the name out, stressing different syllables of the man's name. Or, he wonders, is it his name? Who is Hannibal Lecter? If it isn't him, then why's he got so many of his memories in his head?

"Why do you say that? That you have so many of his memories?" There's someone speaking, he recognizes the voice, but a small but growing part of him whispers that he doesn't deserve attention, that he's a zealot trying to reconstruct himself into the image of a god.

"I am… on drugs. That was for a reason." He knows this, he just can't bother to put in the effort to remember why.

"Yes, you're drugged. Will you tell me if Hannibal Lecter ever drugged you?"

Drugs, yes. Hannibal and drugs. He remembers doing drugs, sliding a needle into his arm to feel *something* other than the overwhelming boredom those god awful French med students forced upon him with their incessant gossip and underwhelmingly modest politics.

Or, was that someone else? His head slips down to glance at the pale expanses of his arms. They are muscular but not the same as those from the memory. The walls of the French boarding school fade and he wonders when they had appeared in the first place. Is he hallucinating?

He hallucinated often, before. He remembers the stag, almost fondly, and re-remembers the monster even fonder. Remembers seeing those cheekbones facing him as he slouches in his seat, so similarly to the way he does now.

“Drugs,” he chirps, for what he thinks might be the first time in a few minutes, “I was drugged. The light is too bright.”

The voice sighs. “Mr. Graham, there’s nothing we can do about the lighting right now.”

“No. no, no, no nooo. The light then. So bright. I forgot, wanted to forget, he wanted me to forget, we forgot it. He would go under so nicely for me. So trustworthy that he would do anything I asked him. ‘Sit down’, I’d say, he’d say, ‘just forget and be good’. Forgot everything.”

“So he would induce a state of hypnosis and compel you to forget what he did? Or did you do that to someone?” The voice keeps prodding, and he hates it. He wants to be left alone. He wants to be with *him* , see him sitting in the chair across from him, listening, understanding, *seeing* .

But he never saw, not until it was too late. “It was dangerous for him to know, y’know? He’s too clever for his own good. Had to keep him enough in the dark to protect him. If he knew too soon, then I woulda had to kill him. So I let him stew. Stew. Stew until I had guided him enough.”

“Who? Who… stewed?”

He jerks his head up. “Will Graham? Hannibal Lecter? Who is who? I am him, and he is me and the both of us will soon be free. Prison really is dreadful, even if you’re getting out soon.” He lets out a breathy chuckle.

“Why do you think you’ll be released soon?”

“Haven’t you heard? The Ripper’s back in business.”

~

Will vomits when he’s delivered back to his cell. The door barely manages to click shut before he’s dropping to his knees and choking out his lunch. His hands are still locked behind his back.

The guard must call for help because by the time his heaves have turned to pants the cell door is swinging open again and he’s being hauled to his feet.

He’s never seen the medical wing as a patient before, at least not when he could remember it. He knows that he must’ve spent some time here while he was recovering from encephalitis but he spent most of his recovery in a medical coma, and the rest of the time he was too woozy to focus on much besides the overwhelming sickness he felt.

The doctor on staff tuts as she takes a blood sample. “Now, my guess is that this is a reaction to Chilton’s ‘therapy’ treatments. I’ve seen this kind of thing happen to his favorite patients before. Hell, even Abel Gideon had graced my door once or twice in a similar state. Despite the warnings, that man likes to use just enough of that dreadful concoction to cause a physical response but not enough to cause lasting damage.”

It’s relieving, distantly, to know that this has happened before and likely won’t kill him. “Fuck that guy,” he groans, grunting out a muffled *fuck* as another wave of nausea overtakes him.

Hannibal would be livid if he found out, Will thinks to himself. If he felt any better he might've laughed but at the moment he's too focused on not puking his stomach lining out.

The doctor gives him some medicine to help soothe his stomach and a bowl of crackers to munch on while on vomit watch. Once a half hour has passed, she gives the guards the thumbs up to take him back to his cell.

As he's being dragged into standing, he glances over his shoulder at her. "Can you pass on a message for me?"

Her brown eyes take in his purposefully hopeful look, the raise of his eyebrows and the lift of his chin. "Depends on who to and what the message is." She pretends to be busy, but he knows he's got her interest. She fiddles with a plastic wrapped scalpel on the table.

"No one special. I just want to ask my friend, Doctor Hannibal Lecter, if he thinks I should sue for medical misconduct. Try and keep this from happening to anyone else, at least." He jerks his chin in the direction of the empty bowl that used to hold his crackers.

She smiles at him, cheeky and knowing. "I'll make sure to pass it along. You're lucky to have a friend like Doctor Lecter, I've heard good things about him." Her brown cheeks darken further with a blush.

"He's cute, huh? Don't think there's a single person who's met him that doesn't have a crush on him." He winks at her, grinning as she bursts into laughter.

"I don't spend much time in the actual hospital, but I've seen him in the lobby. He's always so eager to see you, y'know? Whether or not you killed all those people, he sure as well won't change his mind about you."

It's Will's turn to anxiously shift. His face feels warm so he ducks his chin. She takes pity on him and doesn't say anything else.

The guard scoffs and tugs Will by the shoulder out the door.

~

His cell has been cleaned by the time he gets back. It smells faintly of chemical cleaners. He flops onto the bed, leaning against the wall. Finally alone, he can think about what the hell went on in that ‘therapy’ session with Chilton.

Unsurprisingly, it seems as though Hannibal has wanted Will close for a while, but wanted to avoid the risks that came with letting himself be fully seen too early on in their relationship. He wanted to build a sense of dependence in Will, and Will begrudgingly admits that it worked. Even better than Hannibal could ever have guessed.

Will now spends almost his every waking moment thinking about Hannibal, his plans, his kills, his life in general. Will also can’t help but spend every night reliving Hannibal’s memories. And, now, sometimes he enters Hannibal’s memory palace while awake. Maybe there’s a way he can visit Hannibal’s mind palace without assistance from Chilton’s mind melting cocktail of drugs.

Will’s eyes slip closed and his heart rate slows, an act so familiar to him it takes no effort at all to find the comfort of his stream. Before he really settles into the water, though, He forces himself to think of the high walls of the chapel, the sprawling expanse of hallways that lie behind each door.

When he opens his eyes, it’s to find himself in the chapel once again. Getting here was easier than he had expected, but he’s shocked he managed it at all. Though, he assumes it’ll be just as easy as slipping into the minds of his killers, eventually.

He slips down the path he’s taken night after night until he’s at the steps of the hall he knows now to be dedicated to memories of Will and Abigail, and the occasional fonder memory of Alana. He hates those ones the most, though he’s glad they’re so few and far between here.

He wants to see if Hannibal has been investigated by Jack yet, and he thinks that this is the most honest way to go about it. Hannibal, of course, values preserving his memories over nearly all else. A person wouldn't go through the effort to spend decades building a mind palace this vast otherwise.

He knows that a certain replica of Hannibal's office in this section is a gateway to his generic patient meetings, and from there he can probably hop from Bella to Jack. The memories are, after all, connected through an intricate web of associations. *Semantic Network Model,* psychologists call it. Will calls it the world's most unnecessarily complex game of word association.

There is a quarter on the table next to Hannibal's usual chair and a brush of Will's fingers summons a memory of Bella Crawford. She doesn't look sick, at least not to the untrained eye, but he can see the way her breaths are unusually quick and her hands tremble as she grips the armrests to lower herself into the seat across from Hannibal's.

"Suicide seems like a valid solution to my problem," she says, resolved in her choice of action.

"And how does that make you feel?"

"Alive."

All Will can seem to focus on for the moment is the look of utter devastation on Jack's face as he realizes that Bella has cancer. Then, he steps back and wonders how she felt in that first moment. Resigned, probably, based on how certain she is in her inevitable death. Resigned, but not afraid.

Hannibal replies to something she must've said. "I've always found the idea of death comforting."

Will can't help but snort at that.

“The thought that my life could end at any moment frees me to fully appreciate the beauty, art, and horror of everything this world has to offer.”

Will guesses that it’s easy to appreciate those when the three overlap so heavily in one’s eyes.

Not long after, the memory fades as Hannibal escorts Bella to the patient exit. He follows them, stepping through the door to reveal yet another hallway.

There are no doors that lead to Jack’s home, so Will assumes that Hannibal never actually visited. Instead, the few doors present lead to a replica of the door to Hannibal’s study, Jack’s office, a handful of other rooms from FBI headquarters, and what Will suspects might be a hospital room, based on the plainness and the most recent memory he’s seen of Bella.

He enters Jack’s office and does his best to avoid the chair that Will sat in during their first meeting. He isn’t sure if that memory would even be in here, but the risk of wasting time on a memory he doesn’t need to relive forces him to give the chair a wide berth anyway.

In front of the other chair, the one Hannibal tended to sit in, is a conspicuously placed cup of coffee. Steam rises from its dark surface and the scent of coffee fills his lungs. It’s almost overpowering, like his sense of smell suddenly got ten times stronger. *If this is how strong Hannibal’s sense of smell is,* he thinks to himself, *I’m not surprised he’s resorted to murder. If this is what a nice cup of coffee smells like, I bet other people might smell awful sometimes. No wonder he gave me shit for my aftershave.*

As he redirects his attention from the coffee to the rest of the desk, two figures materialize. One, Hannibal, just to his left, and the other, Jack, on the other side of the desk.

Hannibal settles down in the chair, suit jacket draped over his forearm and pooling into his lap. He sits at attention, the intenseness of his gaze and the way he leans forward in his seat ever so slightly as he squares his shoulders only obvious to Will himself. *Bingo* .

“I’m assuming you’ve heard about the orderly from the BSHCI,” Jack starts, face purposefully devoid of emotion. “I won’t play dumb and pretend that you aren’t looking like

a potential suspect, although you aren't the only one. Where were you, the night of the 16th?"

Hannibal doesn't appear fazed by Jack's directness. He's been expecting this. Of course, it was always his plan to draw just enough attention to himself to be able to refute Will's past claim that he is the Ripper. "I was with Alana. All night. You can ask her to corroborate if you must, Jack."

Will seethes. *Fucking Alana, again* . He wants to be mad at Hannibal for using her as an alibi, but it's rather clever, and Alana had been warned enough about Hannibal at the beginning of his incarceration that he only wishes that the inevitable breakup devastates her. He knows Hannibal only appreciates her strict morality, and how he can secretly undermine it so often. Alana isn't *family* . She's hardly a pawn.

He redirects his attention back to the memory in front of him.

"I will be doing that. Had you ever interacted with Matthew Brown when you visited?"

"No, I didn't have the chance to stop by often and even when I did, I paid little attention to the orderlies. Their job description, of course, requires them to blend into the background when not needed. I assume Mr. Brown learned this through observation in his time in psychiatric facilities. Chilton really must do more for vetting his employees."

Jack hums, taking the bait Hannibal laid in front of him. "It is unusual for a director to put so little effort into doing background checks into his employees, especially at such a well-regarded institution."

Hannibal nods at Jack. "If that is all, I have a prior engagement I must be departing to arrive on time for." He stands up, circling the desk to rest a hand on Jack's shoulder. "I'm sure you'll catch this new killer, with or without Will's help."

Jack winces. "Will thinks this killer is the Chesapeake Ripper."

“Do you agree?”

“Whether or not this guy is, I’m less and less certain that Will should be in the BSHCI.”

“You suspect he might be innocent?” Hannibal’s eyes gleam and Will knows he’s enjoying how much Jack is willing to confide in him even when he is directly under investigation for at least one murder.

“Well–” Jack starts, but Will is forced out of his thoughts by a clang from outside of his cell.

A new orderly stands by the slit in the cell, a tray of food propped on the table. Their other hand swings their lanyard in a circle, the obvious source of the clanging. “Welcome to the land of the living. Dinner.” They slide the tray further through and back up as soon as Will stands from his bed.

Will nods in thanks, collecting the tray and settling back to eat. He rushes through dinner, even faster than usual because he has plans for what memories he’ll explore when he falls asleep. There’s less worry about being interrupted then.

When he’s finished he slides the tray back through to be collected by the night custodian and brushes his teeth at the small sink. He slips under the covers and closes his eyes, focusing on moving as little as possible to fall asleep faster.

Eventually the chapel forms in front of his eyes. He makes his way to the right room, the front door to the Hobbs household staring back at him. He inhales deeply to steady his pulse and swings the door open.

Unlike in Hannibal’s house, the kitchen has no door, so he slips through the living room down the hall and into the kitchen. He knows it’s the right version of the kitchen when he spots a stream of blood on the stove burners. Unlike the day he shot Hobbs, the crime scene where Abigail was allegedly killed got blood on that side of the room, originally blocked by Garret Jacob Hobbs’ body.

He approaches and the tangy scent of copper floods his system. Beside him, Abigail and Hannibal fizzle into existence. His long brown peacoat doesn't have a speck of blood on it, a tribute to the impeccable cleanliness of his crime scenes. Abigail, on the other hand, has a few drops near the collar of her floral patterned shirt. At their feet, a streak of blood mimicking arterial spray cuts across the floor.

Hannibal hands Abigail her coat, the wool dyed a deep purple. "I will wait to take your ear until we get home. It will give you time to recover from the blood loss and the ear will be fresh for our Will."

Abigail nods. "Will it hurt?"

"No more so than this," Hannibal soothes with a sweep of a hand gesturing towards the ruined kitchen.

"Good. I'd ask if I could drive, but I don't know if I'd be able to right now. Will I have a car at the new place?"

Hannibal helps lead her out of the kitchen to the backdoor without slipping on her own blood. "Perhaps, after the mania surrounding your inevitable disappearance dies down. You are nearly an adult now, it would be uncouth to restrict your freedoms beyond ways that keep you safe."

Abigail's head jerks to the side to stare at him, eyes wide. "Really? I thought you'd be more…"

Hannibal leads them out the back door, leaving it hanging open. "Like your father? I told you Abigail, him and I share few similarities. I will not punish you for behavior you have not shown, although you still are in trouble for betraying my trust with Nicholas Boyle." They approach an inconspicuous vehicle, a minivan. Hannibal holds the door open for her.

"I… should've done that differently. I just hated the suspense of it all."

The last thing Hannibal says before the car door shuts on Will is "I know, which is why you have the opportunity to win back my trust. You are young, mistakes are inevitable."

The car drives off, fading into the horizon. Will stands in silence, shocked. Abigail isn't just alive, but safe. He had worried that Hannibal was keeping her prisoner in the house by the bluff, that she was in a similar position as Miriam Lass. The next time he sees Hannibal, he's torn between hitting him then holding him at gunpoint to compel him to lead Will to Abigail and bursting into tears. Maybe, he'll do both. Just to shake things up.

He slips back through the back entrance of the house, wandering. He flops down onto the couch, surprised that it feels exactly like he remembers. If Abigail is trying to prove herself to Hannibal, she might force herself to… kill when he encourages her to. He knows the overall emotions from Matthew Brown's first attacker—whom he is now certain was Abigail—were pleasant, but that could have more to do with pleasing Hannibal and getting rid of a threat than her real feelings about killing someone. He can still feel her panic as she guts Nick Boyle.

Jaw clenched, he pushes himself off the couch. Exiting through the front door, he makes his way to a memory he knows takes place in the cliff house. Hopefully he can get where he needs to tonight.

Will slips through the closed door to Abigail's new room to find himself stepping out of a downstairs bathroom and into the living room of the cliff house. To his right, a piano sits, a handful of sheets of music gently curling at the corner with the cool fall breeze. It reminds him that he's been incarcerated for nearly half a year, because of all of the delays in the trial.

The sun beams through the windows, high in the sky. To his left, a tidy, white couch faces a coffee table. Playing cards rest across its surface. He leans over the couch to get a better glimpse and a memory starts.

Abigail sits on her knees on the floor, elbows resting on the table. Hannibal sits across from her on the couch, right next to where Will rests. He looks pretentious in a suit Will has never seen before, white with white floral patterns and a wide lapel and form-fitting waistcoat both in a rich burgundy velvet. It complements his eyes.

Abigail, on the other hand, seems to still be in her pajamas, 3/4 sleeves protecting her from the mid-morning chill and fluffy blue slippers resting on the floor beside her. She shuffles the

deck of cards in her hands, setting aside four piles of 5 cards and dividing the rest between the two of them.

“Marissa taught me how to play this back in middle school. One of her other friends, Veronica, plays with a different card setup, but it’s been a while since I’ve played that and it’s a little more complex so I don’t wanna guess at it.” She slides one of the 5-card piles and one of the larger piles to sit on either side of Hannibal.

“Speed, you called it? And the goal is to get rid of all our cards before the other.”

“Mhm,” she hums. She sets two of the other 5-card piles in the middle of the table, with room between each. “We use these decks in the middle, either of ‘em, to get rid of our cards. We do that by going one card up or down in value, with Jacks being like 11, Queens 12, Kings 13, and Aces are simultaneously 1 and 14, to connect ‘em all.”

“And we can place down any number of cards currently in our hand, as long as they’re in the right order?”

“Yep. If you’ve got all 5 cards in hand able to stack, then go for it. And then you grab more cards from your pile here. You wanna beat the other player so placing a card before they can is imperative. Are you ready to try it out then? We can add another layer of difficulty by talking, if you think you can handle it.” She winks at him and he chuckles.

“I may be older than you, but I’m not senile. I think I can handle myself.”

Abigail instructs him to pick up his hand of cards, then counts down from three so they flip the top card of each deck in the center at the same time. The game commences in a flurry of movement and shuffling cards.

“So, that guy was—dang it, Hannibal!—was in the yard again. Found him sneaking around back and trying the sliding door. It, obviously, didn’t open for him so—ha!—he left. Probably’ll be back soon with a lock pick set. I can help right?”

Hannibal slips a card below the two Abigail was about to set down and she curses again. “You can help as much or as little as you want to. Your level of involvement depends on you. I know you enquired as to how you could help with Isley, but most likely you would be a more active participant than playing surgical resident. I have done most of the work with him but this intruder will need to be subdued before he reaches that level of preparation.”

Abigail slams down the last few cards in her hand, crowing in success. “I won! Hannibal, I know you haven’t gotten to gauge my level of enthusiasm through experimenting with Isley yet but this guy is really pissing me off. I wanna help capture him! I-I could distract him so you can take him downstairs. Do you want to play again? Loser does setup.”

“Distract him how?” Hannibal nods at her question about the game, taking the deck and shuffling the cards for her.

Abigail sits back to think. “I could creep around, I’m small and light so I could follow him around without him noticing. From there, I could open him up, yknow, like I did with Nick Boyle? It’d be like a redo of that, where I wouldn’t be so nervous and outta control and stuff.”

A new game starts and Hannibal stays silent for a moment. When his personal deck is half gone, he speaks up again. “That should work. You say he visits the day after I do? When I drive off today, I can stop at a motel halfway between here and Baltimore. From there, I’ll get a cab to take me the back route then I’ll walk the rest of the way. We can lie in wait for him then.”

“Sounds good to me. After him, we’ll drop Isley as the second body, then the finale will be the big reveal of Lass, right?”

Hannibal tsks as Abigail slips a stack of three cards under his single card. He replaces it and lays two on the other pile. “Correct. She was the last of my previous set, she can reprise her act when we reveal she is alive this time. And, if for some reason the first two bodies aren’t enough for the FBI to release Will, Miriam will point them in Frederick Chilton’s direction.”

“Oh, damn you,” Abigail mutters as Hannibal drops the last of his cards on a pile. She keeps playing, placing cards in her hand until she gets stuck, then she has to take the card from the

bottom of both piles to start again. She finishes just 30 seconds after Hannibal wins, tossing her last card on top and beaming at him. “See? We both won!”

“I think that’s cheating.”

“What?” She splutters. “You’ve never played before! What do you know about what is and isn’t cheating?”

“I know that I won. I know that you kept playing after that. Had I known you would do this, I wouldn’t have stopped when you beat me in the last round. You kept this from me so you could say you won.”

They continue to bicker playfully for a few minutes until they devolve into laughter. Abigail laughs openly, snorting and wiggling back and forth. Hannibal is more subdued, but his big smile shows his crooked teeth. Will wishes he had gotten to play. Maybe he and Hannibal would’ve been a newbie team against Abigail, or he would’ve worked with Abigail to take down Hannibal.

Will ends up spending the rest of the night watching Abigail study Hannibal’s technique as they finish the tableau for Sheldon Isley. All he feels is anticipation—for Jack and Company to find the scene and to finally be able to leave this goddamn prison.

Chapter End Notes

I pinky promise soon we're gonna get a Will-Abigail interaction that isn't Will watching a memory! Also, I said before that there would be around ten chapters, but recently I had a Big Idea so the end is *gestures vaguely*

There is Only My Way

Chapter Summary

Will finally gets released and gives Hannibal an ultimatum; Abigail just wants her father figures to stop planning to kill her.

Chapter Notes

The chapter title is from OTGW again, but is alternatively titled "Oh my fuck I forgot to update on time, I can't believe this happened again"

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It takes a measly two more days for all the DNA samples to be processed off of Matthew Brown's body. An orderly leads Jack and Beverly to his cell, Jack looking more exhausted than Will's ever seen him before. Bev is tense.

"I told you I didn't do it." Will doesn't let either of them speak first, the orderly unlocking the cell door for the final time. He awkwardly shuffles out, wanting to leave as fast as possible so there's no chance he can find his way back behind bars but also just proud enough to feel the need to keep some decorum. The blue jumpsuit he's still wearing and pile of flannel and jeans unloaded into his arms aren't helping.

"You told me to be objective, to find evidence that would either implicate you further or exonerate you. I found eight different DNA samples on Brown: Georgia Madchen, Marissa Schuur, Cassie Boyle, Doctor Sutcliffe, Abigail Hobbs, and one Ripper victim, as well as DNA samples that match the victims of two previously unconnected murder victims," Bev explains, not meeting his gaze. She tucks her hands into the pockets of her leather jacket when a breeze sweeps down the hall.

Jack chimes in, "Why would the Chesapeake Ripper put so much effort into framing you, only to exonerate you a few months after your imprisonment? Why the sudden switch?"

The orderly leads them in the direction of the hospital lobby. Will feels tingly and overwhelmed, the mere thought of being in the sun for the first time sending pure, bubbling excitement down Will's arms and spine. He feels ready to burst from his flesh, seconds from abandoning all semblance of normalcy in place of the simple pleasures derived from being surrounded by nature. He imagines this is how his dogs feel when he stays late at work only to let them outside for the first time in hours.

"This wasn't a sudden switch," Will starts with." "No, the Ripper always planned on letting me go eventually, he just felt rushed to do so because he got bored. He loves the thrill that comes with playing with the FBI, and I was just the most amusing clown at the circus. I had to be put on the sidelines for a bit to get a read on how much of the investigation was being forwarded by me. The issue therein lies in that by framing me, the media redirected its attention away from the murders and towards the salaciousness of the arrest and the preceeding trial." Will only has a moment of hesitation before he stretches the truth to make the Ripper seem like a virtual outsider from the investigation.

"And the Ripper needed to prove that he was not so easily caught. And absolutely not the result of a man suffering from a debilitating illness." Bev settles between Will and Jack as they walk down the hall.

Will nods in confirmation. "The Ripper is calculated and intelligent; he wants the world to know that he is better than those investigating him, foolish enough to arrest the wrong man with just enough evidence to turn my colleagues against me." He doesn't mean it in a harsh manner, is only stating the truth, so when Jack's shoulders rise defensively.

"You got too close so he needed to keep you in check. All we need is to find what made him nervous enough to throw you under the bus. Will–"

"No fucking way, Jack! I'm not your bloodhound, I haven't been since *your team* got me sent to prison when my brain was on fire. I helped you while I was in prison, but it was only because I wanted you to find the guy who put me here, not because I wanted a gold sticker for good behavior and an offer to consult again when I get released. If it's available, I'll go back to my teaching position. *That* is the extent of my involvement with the FBI from now on." Before Jack can reply, Will speeds past the two of them to the end of the hallway, taking a sharp left to enter the guest bathroom to change.

When he gets out, only Bev waits for him in the lobby. “Jack tried to convince me to try and get you to change your mind.”

“And? Are you going to?” Will hopes he doesn’t have to ditch Bev since she is a much better option for a ride home than calling a cab, but he’ll do it if he has to.

Bev scoffs, the sound instantly settling Will’s fraying nerves. “Fuck no. I told him to respect your decision. He has no say in whether you decide to come back or not. Besides, the best way to convince you to start consulting again is for him to prove that he’s going to pay attention to the boundaries you set this time around. If he isolates you now, you’re more likely to back your bags, scoop up your dogs, and vanish off the face of the Earth than look at another crime scene. That got through to him.”

”Thanks, Bev,” he grins, ducking his head to avoid her gaze. “Where–” He stops.

Bev’s eyebrows raise and she grins cheekily. “Where’s your hot doctor? Is that what you were gonna say?”

Will snorts. He doesn’t think his relationship with Alana has ever been close enough that she could be anywhere near considered *his,* but especially not now when she spent the past six months pitying poor, insane Will Graham whose head wasn’t screwed on tight enough to keep from soaking in the minds of killers to the point of emulating them.

“Don’t deny it. Lecter’s been the only one who never thought differently of you during your incarceration. I don’t know if there’s anything you could do that would make him think of you differently.”

Doctor Lecter? Will’s hot doctor? “What the hell, Bev! It’s not like that, he’s—We’re not–” He splutters.

“Oh yeah? Then why’d he offer to rearrange his appointments to pick you up?”

“He did not!” Will hisses.

“Did too. And he even asked me to keep Jack off your back. He thinks that the stress of consulting allowed you to ignore the symptoms of your encephalitis. I can’t imagine that it helped you.”

Will snorts. *The stress of consulting…* like Hannibal himself wasn’t the one who manipulated Will into thinking that his physical symptoms stemmed from mental illness.

“Yes, well why isn’t he here then?”

“Oh he got into it with Jack and he wouldn’t let him come. Besides, he has this 24-hour cancellation policy that Jack reminded him of.”

Will was stunned into silence. Hannibal had planned on dropping everything at the drop of a hat, going against his strict two-way cancellation policy, just to pick Will up from the BSHCI.

“I see you’re short-circuiting so let’s get you home. Alana said she’ll drop your dogs off in the morning.”

Will scrunched his nose at that.

“Not a fan of Alana anymore? Guess that makes sense, she stole away your hot doctor while you were in prison. I don’t think Hannibal thinks it’s serious, but Alana seems committed. But, what do I know, I speak to her once a month, max.” She placates, taking in Will’s deep scowl.

They walk in silence until they get into the car. For the first half-hour of the drive, Bev only occasionally fills the silence with idle chatter and, eventually, the background humming of alternative rock thrumming through her car’s speakers.

Will takes mercy on her and gives in to her obvious desire to talk. “I appreciate that you continued to work to prove my innocence, even if you had no reason to believe me. That… means a lot to me. Jack distanced himself even further because he felt guilty and Alana only saw me as a victim of my own insanity. You… and Hannibal were the only ones who listened to me.”

Bev sighs, her grip on the steering wheel turning to a white-knuckled clinging. “You-you deserved more. You were our coworker for months, I saw you nearly every day, and still… I did the bare minimum for the longest time. And *still* , you talked to me, you helped me when I came to you with a case, you tried to be my friend. You’re a good guy, Will. That has nothing to do with how many cases you solve or how many criminals you put in jail. You give people second chances, even if they sometimes don’t deserve it.”

“You deserved it, Bev. How many more times did you visit me than Alana, or Zeller, or Jack? How many times did you listen to me when I told you about the dream-sharing thing? I couldn’t trust anyone else with that. Only you. ‘Sides, I haven’t given Alana a second chance.”

Bev grins and Will feels giddy pride at raising her spirits. “That’s ‘cause you’re a jealous asshole, Graham! She’s trying to steal your man, you can’t forgive that.”

“Believe me, I haven’t,” Will grumbles under his breath. Bev snickers and he realizes he hadn’t been as quiet as he meant to be.

“I was worried for a moment that the Ripper would frame him. But he’s got a solid alibi, and he’s got enough differences to the profile that it couldn’t possibly be him. Anyway, that Chilton guy seems just odd enough that he seems like a real potential suspect.” The car rolls to a stop at a traffic light and she turns to look at him for a moment. “That reminds me, do you still think Hannibal did… all that?”

Will sighs, long and hard. “No,” he whispers. “Not anymore. It must’ve been… the encephalitis or something, y’know? He couldn’t have. He-Hannibal is my friend, he wouldn’t hurt me.” He stares out the window at the trees that pass by as they start driving again.

“Chilton, on the other hand…” He shrugs, twirling one finger around his temple in a *he’s crazy* gesture.

Bev snorts hard, one hand flying up to cover her mouth as she struggles to keep her laughter in. Will grins along at her.

When she finally calms down enough to speak, Bev wonders aloud, “If it wasn’t the ‘cannibalism’, what gave you the dream-sharing power?”

Will internally panics. *What the fuck is he supposed to say now?* Frantically, he blurts out “I realized I love him, earlier that day. Before I pieced together that the Ripper was a cannibal.” Bev gapes at him and he can’t stop now. “He was on the mind, and he fit the profile enough that he was the easiest target, at the time. But. I wasn’t thinking, I was still recovering. Chilton started his hypnotherapy sessions right after I stopped saying Hannibal did it.”

“Wait, wait, wait! Let a girl process first! You are *in love with* Hannibal Lecter?”

Will nods.

“Shit. Sorry about ‘Lana, then. You *also* say that Chilton tried out some fucky psychiatry on you when you stopped pointing at the Ripper’s future scapegoat?”

Will nods again.

“Well, if he isn’t the Ripper, Chilton just made himself suspect number one for him. I’ll keep you updated, alright? Not enough that Jack has reason to force you back into the job, but enough that you don’t worry about something unexpected roping you or Hannibal back into something you deserve to be free of.”

“Thanks, Bev.”

The conversation shifts, then. They schedule a fishing trip, gossip about Zeller and Price, and Bev tells him about this woman she started seeing, Molly. *She’s perfect, Will, I shit you not.*

Will hopes that works out for her.

Eventually, the car parks in front of Will's house. It seems too quiet without the sound of the dogs filling the silence created when the engine turns off. It doesn't feel like home. He doesn't want to wait for Alana of all people to drop them off.

He unbuckles after a moment, swinging the car door open. "Do you wanna come in? The coffee probably hasn't gone bad, even if everything else did."

Bev's eyes light up. She opens her mouth to answer, then frowns when the buzzing of her phone's vibration cuts through the air. She pulls it out, scowling at it like it kicked her puppy. "Jack," is her only explanation before she answers.

"What, Jack?"

Will can faintly hear Jack's voice through the tinny-sounding speakers, though he can't make anything out.

Bev's face goes pale. "Shit, already? I'll be right over. Text me the address." She hangs up, slopping forward to rest her head on the steering wheel.

"It's the Ripper. Or at least, it looks like it. I gotta go, can I get a raincheck on that coffee?"

Will nods, reaching across the center console from where he's bent over outside the car to pat her shoulder. "You'll get him soon, I know it. The Ripper's getting bored of this game of cat and mouse, he's bound to slip up eventually, if he doesn't just turn himself in outright. I bet it's gonna be the most elaborate, gory confession you'll ever see."

She tilts her head to the side, weakly grinning. "Thanks, Graham. See you later." He closes the passenger door and she pulls out of his driveway after one final wave goodbye.

He goes inside to inspect the damage. It isn't too bad, all things considered. The screen door has been pulled off its hinges and the front door has *monster* and *psycho* spray-painted on it, but Will thinks it's amusing more than anything. The fridge smells awful, some food left to rot in its containers instead of being cleared out. Since his house was still under investigation until two months ago, the door was locked, keeping the damage inside to a minimum. It looks like someone threw a rock through his window, but little else has been damaged by outsiders, even if his stuff has been scattered by the police.

He sweeps up the glass so he doesn't cut himself on it—or the dogs don't when they get dropped off. He uses a staple gun to seal the hole with a plastic sheet and a blanket to keep the cold out until he can fix it properly.

He clears out the fridge, sprays it with bleach to soak the stains, and then gives it a couple of spritzes of Febreze to hide the smells. He wipes off the thin layer of dust that covers everything. He washes his sheets and comforter.

When he thinks the house is as nice as he can get it for the time being, he showers. It's the first time he's had warm water for longer than a minute, the first time he's had a hot shower *period,* since being incarcerated. He stays in until his fingers get all wrinkly, and then he stays in a few minutes more.

He stands in front of his closet, the space heater blasting on his feet. He deliberates on what to wear for a while. He has someone to impress, after all.

He settles for his salmon button-up and gray slacks, leaving the top button unbuttoned. He uses a little gel to organize his curls just enough that they look styled rather than his usual disheveled state. He shaves, just enough to manage his beard. He uses the aftershave Hannibal hates, but also an old cologne he never uses except for when he would go on dates, as infrequent as those were.

He thinks about sending a warning text. He gets in his car, worried it won't start for a moment before the hum of the engine settles over him. He doesn't take his phone out of his pocket, instead silently driving to Baltimore.

It's late when he pulls up in Hannibal Lecter's driveway, but he knows the other man won't care. He shrugs on his jacket as he steps out into the cool fall air. He knocks and soon the

door swings open to reveal his unwitting host.

“Have you had dinner yet?”

Hannibal blinks at him. “I just took the soup off the stove. Come in, let me take your coat.” He ushers Will inside, tucking his jacket into the small coat closet in the foyer.

Hannibal leads Will to the seat to the right of the head of the table, stating that he’ll bring in the first course while Will gets comfortable. Will does, settling in the seat and taking in the familiar surroundings. For a moment, he allows himself to picture a different version of him sitting with Hannibal at his elbow and Abigail grinning from across the table at him.

Settling two plates on either side of the head of the table, Hannibal pops the button of his suit jacket and gracefully sits across from Will. “The first course is Calamarata pasta di Campi, with squid and sweetbreads.”

“Sweetbreads. From what animal?” Will asks, picking his fork up as he keeps his tone casual. A quick glance reveals Hannibal’s cheeky grin.

Will huffs out a laugh despite his best efforts.

“You’re lucky I frequently make enough for leftovers. I wasn’t expecting company.” Hannibal watches as Will scoops up a piece of pasta and meat, their eyes meeting as he takes the first bite.

Will swallows, considering. “It’s good. As always.”

Hannibal finally digs into his own dish. “You once told me ‘the light from friendship wouldn’t reach us for a million years. What changed your mind?”

“Nothing. But you have the opportunity to. I find myself unreasonably willing to give you the change to earn my forgiveness.”

Hannibal sips his wine, red like blood. “What do you feel I must repent for?”

“Don’t give me that, Doctor Lecter! You betrayed me, lied to me. I trusted you, and you hurt me.”

“I never,” Hannibal pauses at Will’s glare. “I rarely lied to you. Only when I felt I had to. Only when you were getting too close when you weren’t ready for the truth yet. You really are too clever for your own good.”

“I had encephalitis! What if I had died?” Will, of course, knew Hannibal wouldn’t have let that happen, but he needs to hear it, needs the truth just this once.

“You had a seizure in my dining room. The next day, you were hospitalized. Had they needed it, I would have directed your doctors in the right direction for proper diagnosis and treatment. But you just couldn’t *stay* in the hospital.”

“You were framing me for Abigail’s murder! You killed Georgia, she was my friend. But you can’t *stand* the fact that I trusted anyone but you to talk about what’s going on in my head.”

Hannibal sighs, setting his silverware down to fold his hands under his chin. “She saw my face. It had to happen.”

“I know, I know.”

“Do you feel upset that I killed her or upset that you couldn’t save her?”

You fucker . “Don’t psychoanalyze me, Doctor,” he grumbles dejectedly. “Did you have to shove her ear down my throat?”

Hannibal takes the change in topic in stride. “You suffer so beautifully,” he practically sighs.

Will can’t stand the look of pure adoration in his eyes. He glares at his plate and shoves the last bite of squid into his mouth before he can say anything stupid.

Hannibal allows him a moment of silence, collecting their plates when they’ve been cleared. He returns with fresh plates. “Cepelinai, stuffed with mushrooms and pork mince, served in a sour cream sauce and bacon bits, accompanied by cabbage with caraway. Cepelinai, originally called didžkukuliai for its shape, is the national dish in my home country, Lithuania. A comfort food, if you will. Hearty and delicious.” He refills his own wine glass, offering some more to Will but accepting when he puts a hand over his half-empty glass in a silent no.

They dig in again, Will groaning in pleasure at the first bite. “I’m almost jealous that you cook for anyone else. I don’t want to share.”

Hannibal’s fork pauses midair, still loaded with a sliver of cepelinai. “If you asked it of me, I would restrict the number of guests who sit at my table.”

“Even Alana?”

“Alana is a friend, and I enjoy her company, but I enjoy yours more.”

“Seems like she’s more than just a friend, as of late.” Will tries not to sound too bitter. He finishes off his wine with a big mouthful that he knows Hannibal would find uncouth.

Hannibal’s face remains unchanged but Will can see the unrestrained amusement in his eyes. Will’s fingers twitch in the direction of his butter knife, the image of jamming it as far into Hannibal’s eye as possible present in the forefront of his mind.

“Recently, Alana has found comfort in the physical development in our relationship. She makes a good alibi.”

“You don’t need her. As you said, ‘you and I are just alike. Problem free.’ Unless, there’s a problem that you’d need an alibi for, hm?” They both ignore the previous discussion of Georgia Madchen’s untimely demise.

The night progresses in idle chatter until midway through the third, and final, course. Will waits until Hannibal is spooning up a perfectly balanced bite of shortcake and seasonal fruits before cheerfully chiming in with “I sent Matthew Brown.”

Hannibal’s spoon suddenly dips in its path to his mouth. It settles gently back on the plate with a soft *clink,* the only sound in the room.

“To do what?”

“Observe you, then report back to me. Do you really wear teeny tiny little speedos at your fancy gym?”

The muscles in Hannibal’s neck relax minutely. “You had him monitor my gym behaviors? If you want to find out whether or not I do, you’ll just have to join me one day.” Hannibal winks.

“I’ll think about it. What’s at that secret house of yours?”

“You’ll find out soon.” Will wonders whether he is referring to Miriam Lass’s inevitable reveal or Abigail.

“Will you take me?”

“If you asked it of me, I’d give you the world.”

“I don’t want the world, I want you to prove I can trust you,” Will huffs. He isn’t as mad at Hannibal as he’s pretending to be, but his habit of answering without giving an answer wasn’t doing him any favors. He pushes his chair back, starting to stand up to leave.

“When do you want to see it?” Hannibal’s voice cuts through the haze of anger starting to blur Will’s vision.

He stops, having just walked beyond Hannibal’s chair. Without turning around, he murmurs, “Would you take me when your plan is done? However you plan to deal with Jack’s suspicions, throw the FBI off of your trail? You’d take me then?”

Hannibal doesn’t hesitate. “That day. I’ll give it to you.”

Will pauses, wanting desperately to wrap his arms around Hannibal’s shoulders, the desire to cut off his oxygen disappointingly less than the desire to absorb his warmth in a long embrace. “Promise me,” he whispers into the silence of the room.

“I promise you this, Will. And know this, I never break my promises.”

Will swallows down the lump in his throat. His eyes burn, whether from tears of sadness or anger, he does not know. “Call Alana. Bring my dogs home. Tonight is best, but I understand if she wants to wait until tomorrow to pass them off. I need to be alone. Maybe I’ll be more willing to speak to you when you drop off the dogs, but right now, I need to think.”

“Of course, Will. May I see you out or will you be alright?”

“You can walk me out.” Will clears his throat and follows Hannibal to the foyer. Hannibal holds his coat for him to slip into.

As he opens the door for Will, Hannibal speaks up again. “Thank you for gracing my table once more. You are always welcome in my home. I will see about returning your pack to you posthaste. Drive safe, Will.”

Will stands awkwardly in the doorway, Hannibal leaning ever so slightly against the door itself. “Dinner was… this was necessary. Thank you for being generally straightforward, I know neither of us is used to opening up like that. It almost gives me hope that you’ll figure out what to do.”

Will hesitates a moment longer before giving in and hurling himself at Hannibal, his arms encircling his waist. “I’ll kill you if you let me down, even once,” he mutters into the other’s shirt.

Hannibal’s arms gently wrap around Will, pressing him tighter to his body. “I’d expect nothing less.”

Will eventually pulls himself away, Hannibal allowing his arms to drop. “Good night, Doctor Lecter. Say hello to Alana for me, thank her for looking after my dogs all this time.”

Hannibal nods and Will finally turns to head to his car, pulling his jacket tighter around his shoulders to block out the freezing air.

~

He’s too wound up to sleep when he gets home and he wants to be awake on the off chance that Hannibal can drop off his pack, so instead he retreats back into Hannibal’s mind palace. The halls he wanders now feel just as familiar to him as his stream and he marvels over the comfort the pale walls provide him as he stands outside of the door leading to many of the memories involving Abigail.

He doesn’t know exactly what he’s looking for, besides further confirmation that Hannibal hasn’t changed his mind and killed her yet. He finds himself back in the living room of the house on the bluff, taking in the trinkets that could potentially hold memories he hasn’t

viewed yet. Those, especially in this room, are few and far between after all the time he's spent both awake and asleep in the area.

Eventually, he finds a leather-bound journal sitting on the bookshelf. Its blood-red bookmark flutters in a soft breeze he can't yet feel, beckoning him to inspect its hidden contents. A finger trailing along the spine starts a memory.

Abigail's long, calloused fingers brush the back of it, as though she has just set it back in its place. Quiet footsteps echo in the room, revealing Hannibal's approach from the hallway where the bedrooms are located. Will knows Hannibal has the ability to walk silently, has been startled by the man's unexpected approach an unreasonable number of times both in real life and while perusing his memories. He huffs a laugh at the realization that he must be purposefully making his footsteps audible so as to not startle Abigail.

Only Will gets to see that side of Hannibal's well-contained monster .

"Hey, Hannibal? If you had to, how would you kill me?" Abigail swivels on a socked foot to face him.

He pauses where he stands, an eyebrow raising at the question. "You were meant to be your father's final victim; I would see that ending come to fruition."

Abigail nods. "That makes sense. You didn't think about your answer. How long have you considered this?" She settles on the couch, elbow resting on the back of it so she can plop her head in her hand. Her face is blank, but Will can see the exhaustion hidden in her gaze.

"Since you answered the phone on Garret Jacob Hobbs' behalf. I knew two things: that I would have Will kill your father, and that if ever the need arose, I would kill you in whatever way your father might try to. You suspected this answer?"

"Mhm. Even though you see him as a lesser killer than you—a lesser man—you respect his tenacity. He simultaneously managed to be an entertaining foe for the FBI for a moment and the cataclysm for Will's becoming. It's only right to honor him as thanks for that. That, and you think it amusing how dedicated to cannibalism he was. Eating me as he would want me

to be consumed would be no hardship for you. Slit my throat, let me bleed out, and consume as much of me as you can."

"Your analysis is astounding. I find myself unnerved that you've managed to see this much of me. And at the same time, I only wish to encourage your progress more."

"That doesn't surprise me either. You're an incredibly emotion-driven individual when you allow yourself to be. It's when you're at your strongest. But simultaneously—because you're not used to that level of expressed vulnerability—it's when you're at your weakest. You microdose on other people's emotions—you cry at the opera, play another's mass. Devote a kill to honoring Botticelli. But rarely do you allow yourself to express yourself like that.

"Will is the first person, maybe ever, maybe in a long time, that makes you feel so wholly. He's inspired you to compose. You draw him constantly. You've even killed for him, your most personal art form. But that is all you've allowed him. You hoard these expressions of your… feelings for him, never letting him see how much he means to you. He let you in, but as soon as he got too close, you got skittish and pushed him away. You'll never reach your true potential without him."

Hannibal is silent for a long moment. "I must… fully come to terms with the fact that he completes me, provides me with what I need to become the most realized version of myself."

"Yeah. He needs you too, like that. You just went about it all wrong, maybe. You didn't show him that you need him, all you did was show that you can manipulate him as you do to every insect you stumble across that intrigues you. He's better than an insect, Hannibal. Tell him that. Better yet, show him that. Or else he might not be in your life much longer. You'll get us all killed, or worse."

Hannibal frowns thoughtfully, finally continuing to the kitchen as he intended. "I'll make us lunch but I'll head back to Baltimore soon after. Will has just been released and I hope to bring him breakfast tomorrow." He turns and pushes the door open, pausing when Abigail speaks up again.

"Just… figure out what you want exactly with Will. Or else he might decide for all of us."

Hannibal doesn't answer, slipping silently past the door.

Abigail huffs, shaking her head. She smiles sadly in the direction of the kitchen. She fades into nothingness soon after.

As Will starts looking through the room for another memory he's shaken from his thoughts by a knock on the front door. His real front door.

He swings it open to reveal his pack, seven fluffy heads panting happily up at him. He laughs and crouches down to give them all pets, catching movement in the corner of his eye. Standing off by his car is Hannibal, observing the scene with a blank face.

Ellie breaks from the pack to come snuffling over to him and he blinks, looking down at her. "Hello, lovely lady. May I help you?" A hand slips out of his jacket pocket to rub circles around her ear.

Hannibal's lilting voice speaking so seriously to his dog makes Will chuckle, drawing the attention of the pair he's observing. He lifts a hand in a wave to greet Hannibal. "Come inside, why don't you? It's cold."

Hannibal's head dips down in a nod and he weaves between the dogs running excitedly in circles on the porch. He pointedly does not remove his coat.

Will heads into the kitchen, scraping together some coffee from his barebones kitchen. Hannibal settles a hip against the counter by the stove, watching Will's every movement. Will would find the moment domestic if not for the blatant tenseness in Hannibal's shoulders.

"You leave my hour open?" Will hands off a mug of coffee to Hannibal as he leans his back against the counter next to his guest, just a few inches away from touching.

"Always," Hannibal admits.

Will knew that, to some extent, but the honesty makes him feel warm.

"Good. I'll come to see you then. Don't have any cases, so I'm not sure what we'll talk about, but we can figure that out later. I need to go to the grocery store, not much is left from before being arrested. I didn't really plan ahead for that," he complains dryly.

Hannibal huffs a laugh. "I should've taken initiative and bought you groceries as a welcome home present. Poor amount of foresight on my part."

"You wouldn't have needed it if *someone* hadn't framed me," Will counters, hip checking Hannibal to see him sway in place. *Damn him for being solid enough not to have moved much.*

They stand in silence for a moment, sipping their coffees and watching the dogs weave in and out of the kitchen.

"If you had just told me, I would've been infinitely less angry than I am. I trusted you *so much* , you could've said outright, 'Hey, Will! I'm the Chesapeake Ripper! I've killed dozens of people!' and I… it wouldn't hurt so much. You used my trust against me. You could have told me." Will sniffs, holding the mug closer to his nose to try and warm it up.

"What would you have done?"

Will glances up at Hannibal. "Huh?"

"If I had told you, what would your most likely course of action have been?"

Will considers for a moment. "When you told me that you helped Abigail hide Nicholas Boyle's body, I was mad that I was left out, that you both lied to me about it. I also knew that

if I had told Jack, he would've dragged you down with Abigail. If you had been honest with me… I worked in the FBI, I could've made sure they never got too close."

Hannibal smiles bitterly. "That would not have been enough for me, Will. I would not have settled for you being complicit in my crimes. I needed to look at you and see that darkness in you that I adore blossom, run rampant. I would have pushed you until you wreaked havoc uncaringly."

"You would have? Has that changed?"

"In your absence, I realized I missed you more than any potential you had. You are my friend Will, I can settle for your understanding as long as I don't lose you."

"Would you kill for me?"

"Yes." Hannibal doesn't hesitate.

"I would have, for you. I think a large part of me still would. I don't know fully, yet. I know that I can't escape you, you are the voice narrating every thought in my head, you are who I can't let go of, you make me feel emotions I never thought were possible. I don't know if I would survive separation."

Hannibal sets his now-empty mug on the counter and turns to face Will fully. "Nor do I."

Will creeps forward, socked feet an inch from Hannibal's leather shoes. "Good," He whispers, head tilting up to meet his gaze. Maroon eyes twinkle with unshed tears, gazing into him like he were the world.

Hannibal leans forward to rest his head on Will's shoulder, arms enveloping him in a hug for the second time that night. Muffled by his shirt, Will can hear Hannibal mumble "What you do to me, dear Will, leaves me adrift. I am yours to guide through the waters, only you can save me now."

Will huffs a laugh. “I’m your paddle?”

“I realize the irony, but you were not unmoored, back then. You never would have needed me, had I not done what I did. Just ill.”

“Do you need me?”

When Hannibal nods, face still buried in his shirt and his fingers tangling themselves into the fabric at Will’s ribs, Will sucks in a deep breath. He feels powerful, at this moment. He could break Hannibal, if he wanted to. Leave and never turn back, or push him until he destroys himself to please Will.

He doesn’t want to. He is certain that if things had been any different, Hannibal less open or his dreams not filled with Hannibal or Will himself a little more vengeful, he would have. But in this moment, Hannibal clinging to him with all his strength and a connectedness he’s never felt with anyone else, he can only pull Hannibal closer, tangling his fingers in his hair.

No one can take Hannibal away from him, not Jack, not Alana, not Hannibal, or Will himself.

He runs his fingers through Hannibal’s hair again, admiring how soft it feels. “Let’s go to bed. It’s late. If you aren’t up for sharing, I can sleep on the couch.”

Hannibal doesn’t say anything, just relaxes his arms around Will enough for him to slip out of the hug and tug him towards the living room.

Will slips out of his pants and shirt and switches them for an old shirt and loose pajama pants, never having changed when he got home. He hands Hannibal a looser pair of pants, hoping that will be enough to make up for his slightly longer legs and broader frame. He can’t imagine that any of his shirts will comfortably fit him since his shoulders are narrower.

Will can’t help but admire Hannibal as he redresses and gets snuggled in the space closest to the door. His arms are toned and graying hair covers his chest. Will tries not to think about how hot Hannibal apparently is, but as he settles in the bed next to him there’s little to distract him. Less so, when one of those strong arms rests at his hip and tugs him closer to Hannibal. He gives in and buries his face in Hannibal’s chest, breathing deeply and surrounding himself in the scent of Hannibal and home.

It’s devastatingly easy to fall asleep after that.

Chapter End Notes

I've had a bunch of ideas about what to do next hit me one after the other in recent weeks, but I've been too busy to develop them further than a barebones outline, so I'll probably end up taking a week or two mini-hiatus while I work on those (and since finals week is about to start :/). I never thought this would be so long but this fic is officially a Big Boi for me and I wanna put in the effort that reflects how much I fucking adore this fandom. So, maaaaybe 1 more week of updates before the break, but I'll be back before the end of December (I pinkie promise I'll do my best to not go against that statement)
Happy Chanukah to everyone who celebrates and (according to my Jewish gf who declared all cats Jewish by association) all cats!
If I don't return b4 Christmas, merry Christmas to those who celebrate :)

There is Only Me

Chapter Summary

Will's first domestic morning with Hannibal. And, Will decides to meddle some more. Sorry, Alana. Featuring: a reference to American Psycho (because I've seen that now)

Chapter Notes

Hello! I am back! Today's chapter title is from OTGW again. So excited to finally have everything more set up and I have the next few chapters either written or well-planned. This chapter is slightly shorter because it introduces the next big arc. I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The scent of frying meat is the first thing he is aware of when he wakes up. Then, he recognizes the pleasant warmth that surrounds him, vastly different from the blistering heat that he had radiated outward due to fever from the encephalitis. His stomach growls, the only thing that encourages him to open his eyes instead of relaxing back into his blankets and going back to sleep.

He cracks a sleepy eye open and, after a moment of blinking the blurriness of good sleep away, he notices the dining table is set up. A large vase filled to the brim with gorgeous blooming flowers sits surrounded by white candles in silver candelabras that definitely didn't come from Will's house, with two placemats set up on either side of the table.

The sounds from the kitchen come to a head as the sound of scraping and dishes clinking replace the gentle stirring that had previously come from the kitchen. Will takes that as his sign to get up, wrapping the comforter around his shoulders as he sleepily shuffles to the dining table.

Hannibal emerges from the kitchen with two bowls and two mugs balanced in his hands, smiling softly at Will as he sets one of each in front of where Will has seated himself.

“A breakfast scramble,” Will notes, eyeing the pieces of sausage at the top of the scramble eggs, accentuated by diced bell pepper. It looks just as tasty as it smells. He shovels a big spoonful into his mouth as Hannibal starts speaking.

“I had hoped to create a sort of do-over between us, not to cast aside my misdeeds but to symbolize a change in perspective in regards to our interactions, at least on my part.”

Will glances at Hannibal, taking in his more casual attire--a red sweater and soft black pajama pants--and the way he rests his head on his palm, choosing to observe Will for the time being instead of eating the scramble in front of him.

He juts a hand out. “Will Graham, ex-Special Agent for the FBI. I don’t like therapists.”

Hannibal stands up, circling the table to stand in front of Will. His hand grasps Will’s solidly, warmth settling into Will’s skin. “Doctor Hannibal Lecter. I’d hate to disappoint by being predictable, but I am a psychiatrist.”

“Oh, Doctor,” He purrs, suddenly tightening his grip on Hannibal’s hand and tugging him forcefully closer, “very little about you is predictable; you could hardly disappoint, in that aspect at least.”

Hannibal stumbles forward, the artificial height difference nearly making his knees buckle as he spreads his legs to fit Will in the space between them. Will can hear him muffle a gasp with a bite of his lip.

Despite him physically being below Hannibal, they both know exactly who has the high ground as Will’s thumb traces Hannibal’s knuckles. He blinks slowly, like a cat, practically purring in satisfaction at the sight of Hannibal’s pupils dilating.

“Eat your breakfast.” Will breaks the silence by quoting Hannibal from all those months ago, enunciating the message by gesturing to the abandoned bowl on the opposite side of the table.

Hannibal's face goes blank, all desire and uncertainty vanishing in the blink of an eye. The only hint to his emotional turmoil is the minute clenching and relaxing of the muscles in his jaw. He grins politely and sits back down, picking up his spoon.

As Will collects the bowls and hand washes them in the sink, to Hannibal's chagrin, a phone rings in the living room, a handful of soft chimes.

Hannibal excuses himself to answer his phone and Will slows his movements enough to still sound busy while being able to hear Hannibal's half of the conversation.

"I know, and I must beg your forgiveness, Alana. What I did was terribly impolite."

The voice on the other end, Alana apparently, is shouting, through what she's actually saying is inaudible.

"Yes, I brought them to Will's, upon request." Did Hannibal steal his dogs for him? He sighs into the phone then continues, "Yes, he was dreadfully insistent. No, I don't know why. Perhaps he is still recovering from the betrayal of being imprisoned. He saw you as more of a work colleague than I, and I always hoped he had been innocent."

Alana's voice is much quieter now. Will tilts his head to try and get a better grasp on her tone and the top of his head brushes against something.

He spins around to find that Hannibal had snuck up on him while Alana was speaking. Will just shrugs.

Hannibal puts the phone on speaker. "-you really think that he is distancing himself from me because of that? I mean, come on, Hannibal! He accused you of being the Chesapeake Ripper and now you want to tell me that he's moved on and is cozying up to you to the point that you felt the need to use last night as an excuse to steal his dogs for him?" The emphasis that he puts on *last night* alerts Will to the fact that there was more than just talking going on between the two of them.

Will scowls at Hannibal, mouthing “Break up with her,” at him.

Hannibal raises his eyebrows. To Alana, he suggests “Perhaps our dear Will has been left feeling unmoored by all these sudden changes. He is coping by clinging to the familiar. You were the primary voice in his trial advocating that he had entered a dissociative state to kill his victims, perhaps he is upset at the reminder that those around him were certain that he was capable of committing such atrocities at all.”

Hannibal watches in amusement as Will angrily mouths at him to once again break up with Alana.

He nods at Will, then redirects his attention to the phone call. “I am dreadfully sorry for the timing, but I don’t think our relationship can continue, at the moment. I need time to adjust to all the things going on involving the Ripper investigation and Will’s release. The distance would do me some good, and you, I’d imagine.”

Alana scoffs. Will can almost see her huffing in shock, lips pouty and eyebrows raised. “You’re breaking up with me over the phone? Rude, Hannibal, it’s immensely inconsiderate! I thought I was a part of your support system?”

Hannibal shrugs at Will, in an *Alana will think what Alana will think* sort of way. “You still can be, I would not bar you from that. Perhaps I can make it up to you with dinner. You, me, and I’ll see if I can get Will to join us. I must be going now, Alana.”

Alana mumbles goodbye, dejectedly hanging up.

“Disappointingly enough, I really must be going soon if I want to arrive on time for today’s appointments.”

Will nods. “I have to see if I have a job left. Maybe I will start fixing boats again.”

He walks Hannibal to the door, if only to make sure he doesn’t plant evidence for any other crimes while Will’s attention is elsewhere. He feels awkward waving goodbye from the front porch, but the dogs distract him from watching Hannibal pull out of the driveway by insisting he starts a game of toss with them.

The relative silence lets him finally consider the memory he slipped into yesterday. He wants Abigail to consider him family, and knows Hannibal's been trying to get her to see them as such for her. The sight of her disappointed gaze after Hannibal admits to knowing how he would kill her gives him pause.

There's also the issue of how he'll get revenge on Hannibal in a way that won't totally destroy Will himself in the process. He still has a backup plan for tricking Hannibal into turning himself in, but he now sees that as a last resort. A punishment for if Hannibal fucks up his 'apology' well enough.

He does have to consider Abigail's safety now, though. He can't imagine the guilt he would feel if he pushed Hannibal into a position where he killed her. He wants to talk to her, and he's unwilling to wait until Hannibal takes him to see her.

First, he breaks into Hannibal's house while the man himself is out. He knows Hannibal will likely smell him there, but it's a necessary pit stop for finding his way to the cliff house. He makes sure to avoid the kitchen and the obvious--obvious to him, anyway--weapons scattered throughout the house. He lays in Hannibal's bed for a few minutes, letting his scent rub off on the pillows and under the sheets to distract from his real intentions.

He goes through the medicine cabinet and finds what he needs--a spare bottle of Hannibal's cologne--and then for good measure roots around under the sink and in the shower. Hannibal apparently has Patrick Bateman levels of dutifulness when it comes to his facial routine. The comparison makes him chuckle.

He leaves with the cologne, a bottle of wine, and one of Hannibal's ties, just for fun. He also sneaks in a dirty, old dog toy where the tie used to be.

He gets back home before 3 p.m. and decides to first do what he said he would. He sends an email to HR asking if he still has a teaching position and, as a precaution, begins drafting an Ebay ad for boat repair and maintenance. He decides, spur of the moment, to text Beverly a photo of Buster chewing on Max's tail, Max looking dejectedly over her shoulder at the camera.

After his chores are complete, he gets to work finding a memory that could lead him to the exact location of the cliff house. It helps that Hannibal gave the exact plan for how he had snuck around to kill Matthew Brown without the stalker's knowledge.

In Hannibal's Baltimore house, the real one, Will knows there's a garage around back, since the man's driveway is always free of cars. That seems as good a starting place as any, so he wanders the bottom floor of the unreasonably large house until he slips through the right door.

The garage is massive, like the rest of the house. It's big enough that it could fit Will's entire living room in and still have some space for a car or two. The door has a small staircase leading down to the actual room, and the layout leads Will to suspect that half of the space actually lies under the house itself, the upper area only taking up a small room's worth of the first floor and leading out to the backstreet through a ramp that spans the entire room.

There are three cars stored in the garage: Hannibal's usual Bentley, a more inconspicuous mid-2000's gray SUV, and a small, red Honda Civic in decent condition. Will had assumed that Hannibal uses a different car for his crimes but he is impressed that the man has two secret murder cars.

He tries the Civic first, hoping that the car's smaller size would be Hannibal's go-to when committing non-murder related crimes. He settles in the back seat, assuming that's the best spot to settle in without running into the chance of summoning a memory only to find himself physically inside of someone. He's never interfered with the replaying of a memory before and he sure as hell doesn't want to find out if there are any consequences. Not right now, at least.

There isn't much to mess around with to summon memories, a pocket-sized packet of tissues on the dash, a handful of CDs in the center console, a single soda bottle cap on the backseat floor. The cap is so unusual he immediately gravitates towards it, fingers tracing the shape of it and flinching away as they brush a sticky spot on the side. His fingers smell like soda when he pulls away.

"This is my car?" A familiar voice chirps. Abigail.

Will glances up to see Abigail settling into the driver's seat, pulling the door closed all the way as she settles in. Hannibal joins her a moment after in the passenger seat, gray suit looking unusually tame. He looks like an upper-middle class businessman more than a high society shrink with a penchant for visiting the opera and murdering the rude.

Hannibal nods. "I ask that while you are staying here you do not drive anywhere until the search for your body dies down somewhat, but once you relocate to the safehouse you will generally be free to do as you wish. The towns nearby are far from Baltimore and have much smaller populations so the likelihood of anyone recognizing you is much smaller. I must ask that you still act with caution when out and you let me know ahead of time where you will be going so that if anything happens I may be better prepared to correct the situation."

Abigail's smile drops slightly at that. Both her and Will can see the silent threat spoken in that; should she do something Hannibal does not approve of, she is just as much at risk as those who might do her harm if they recognize her. Still, Abigail nods.

"Much less strict than my dad," she chuckles sardonically. "He downloaded tracking apps on my phone to monitor where I was at all times and *still* I had to verbally report to him any time I got behind the wheel. I wasn't even hiding from the law, then. Not to this extent, at least." She picks at the high collar of her blouse, next to her scar.

"If you would like to, I can direct you to the safehouse now so you know where to go should either of us need to flee there at a moment's notice."

Abigail considers this with a tilt of her head. "No thanks, not today. I'm still worried it's too soon. Next week?"

Hannibal's head dips in a nod. "If I have company, I will alert you ahead of time so you may hide in here or the basement. If you want to, you may bring non-perishable snacks and drinks to store in either location in case the visits grow too long for you."

"Can I bring sodas?"

Hannibal sighs deeply. “If you must, but only a few. They’re unhealthy, and I don’t much like the smell.”

Abigail grins at him as the memory fades. *Next week,* Will thinks, *great* . Next week could be virtually any time since he coughed up Abigail’s ear up to a few weeks ago, and he is only mostly certain the memory happened here. He tries to stay positive, thinking about what he wants to say to Abigail when he finally finds the cliff house. He shuffles around a bit longer, activating memory after memory that occurs in the small vehicle until he finally finds the right one.

The first good sign is how the walls of the garage fizzle out to reveal massive trees lining a well-cared-for dirt road. Abigail sits in the driver’s seat, Hannibal beside her in the passenger’s side with a physical map unfolded on his lap, the second hint that he’s finally found the right memory.

“-nd here is where the actual house is located,” he finishes explaining, allowing Abigail time to glance over at the map as she slows down at a bend in the road. “Do not remove this from the car if you don’t need to, and if ever you do, make sure to keep it with you at all times. I am sure I don’t need to stress the dangers that come with losing this map.”

Abigail hums in agreement. “So, the red dot is this place and the purple one is your house. Where is Will’s house from here? It’s not on the map is it?” Her brown hair is shorter now, just long enough to curl at her shoulders and cover her missing ear. She must’ve gotten it cut right before switching to this house, where she let it grow back out. Her hair was never this short in the more recent memories from the cliff house.

“You would be correct. Will lives in Wolf Trap, which is just below the edge about here,” Hannibal confirms, a pen in his right hand drawing a small arrow in the bottom left corner of the map. “If you follow this road here,” he draws a smaller arrow on the highway leading out of Maryland and towards Wolf Trap, “eventually you’ll see an exit sign that will direct you to Wolf Trap from there. I can give you more specific instructions later since I have a larger map at the cliff house.”

“Oh, thanks Hannibal. Even if I had a phone right now I’m just terrible at following directions on Google Maps.” She sticks her tongue out, nose scrunched up in disgust. Will can practically recall whatever Maps mishap she’s so disgusted by. It’s not often that Will gets to see such open emotion on her face; he wonders if that’s because of him in particular or

where they tended to meet. Or, could she see how often he lied to her and she, in turn, hid herself from him?

Will gets one last look at the map, studying the details as Hannibal answers Abigail's occasional question about the trip. Once he's sure he has the location memorized he exits the dream space, blinking a few times to adjust to the change in surroundings.

He lets his dogs out once more to make sure no accidents happen while he's gone then he hops in his car. He brings the borrowed bottle of cologne to douse himself in again once he arrives, just in case.

It takes just under two hours to get there, but the ride is peaceful. Most of the way, his only company is the trees, or an occasional deer crossing through the forest nearby. He counts each one and is unnerved to pass by deer number 10 just as he turns down the road that leads up to the cliff house. Ten deer, ten girls leading to Abigail Hobbs, if he counts the ones that Hannibal killed under his Copycat moniker.

The house is even more impressive from the outside, when he can see the entire building. Several rooms are on display through floor-to-ceiling windows, natural light causing the rooms to glow. Movement in a smaller window in the second story draws his eye. He parks out front and clambers out, hand raised to block the sunlight so he can peer up at the window.

He covers himself in a couple spritzes of the cologne then tosses it onto the passenger seat. The door is unlocked when he carefully turns the handle with a hand covered with his shirt. His footsteps echo in the empty living room. "Abigail?" He calls out towards the stairs in the back half of the house.

He makes his way to the stairs, pausing on the first step when he hears a floorboard creak behind him.

" *Shit,* " she whispers and he laughs, spinning around to face her.

She stands a few yards behind him, black blouse and matching leggings clearly hastily thrown on by the odd way it sits on her neck and the tips of her hair still tucked underneath it, a butcher's knife in her hand.

"All black? Good for hiding bloodstains. Worried that if I attacked, you'd have to hide it from Hannibal."

It's not a question but she nods anyway. "What are you doing here, Will?"

"I wanted to see you. Hannibal doesn't know I'm here."

" *That* I gathered. Why doesn't he?" She sets the knife on the table next to her on the couch and gestures for him to join her.

"I'm not supposed to know you're alive yet."

A light brown eyebrow raises at that.

"It's gonna sound crazy. I mean, real crazy, not normal me crazy."

"I'm hiding from the FBI with help from a cannibalistic serial killer whom I let fake my own death. Try me," She deadpans.

Will can't help but huff a laugh, slouching down farther into the couch. "A few weeks into my… stay at the BSHCI, I had a dream. In this dream, I found myself in a building I'd never seen, surrounded by memories that aren't my own. Every night since, I've ended up in the same place, wandering the halls of Doctor Lecter's memories. I found out how to get here from that."

Her hands, previously supporting her head as she leans against the back of the couch to face him, flop down into her lap. "'Kay, you're right, that is crazy. But, hell. You two are weird enough that I wouldn't be surprised if you ended up being magical soulmates."

Will goes to correct her but she raises a hand to silence him. “Nope! You don’t get to reveal that you’ve been able to relive someone else’s memories, someone whom you have had an *intense* bout of eyefucking with basically every time I see you, so who the hell knows what goes on when it’s just the two of you, and not expect me to come to the soulmates conclusion. Hannibal is like, full on *in love with you,* Will. Don’t lie to me, not again.”

Her serious look silences any criticisms to her logic he might’ve raised otherwise. “Are you… okay? Are you happy here?” Will changes the subject.

“Eh,” she wiggles her hand back and forth, “living while under Hannibal’s watch has its pros and cons. For the most part, I… like living with Hannibal, Will. I know I’m not entirely safe with him, but it’s better than with my dad, I don’t wake up fearing that today might be the last time I do.

“At first, Hannibal was just keeping me around because he was fond of your protectiveness over me and he wanted to see my Becoming. Now, I mean, I know I’m not his favorite person and I don’t know if he loves me or anything but I’ve become a fixture in his life. He’s excited to run away with us because *we* are his family, not just you. He has this idea in his head of what we could be.

“I wasn’t super on board at first, if I’m being honest, because you really scared me up in the cabin. But Hannibal was so confident that you’d join him and he was so intense about the whole thing, it kind of endeared itself to me as time went on. Call me… hopefully curious about it all. He *is* proud of my achievements, wants to see how I flourish without the threat of imprisonment around every corner. He understands *me* , he knows. That part is nice.

“You told me once that killing is the ugliest thing in the world but it *isn’t* , I knew that before Hannibal and I know it now. He just makes it safe for me if I want. And besides, since Nick Boyle, Hannibal hasn’t let me kill anyone all on my lonesome, even if I wanted to.” She sighs, and he knows the cons are coming.

“He scares me, sometimes. He doesn’t get angry or react like other people do. He remembers and he waits. He’s constantly scheming and if I wasn’t so certain that he still plans to punish me for Nick Boyle, I might be happier here. But I know he isn’t and I just don’t know when the other shoe is going to drop.

And his plans with Miriam Lass, I don’t know what the full idea is but it scares me. She’s stuck here, tugged along by his whims like I am. I wanna help her but if I do, I might end up right beside her in that basement, drugs pumping through my veins and Hannibal in my head.”

Will scowls. He hadn’t considered that Miriam’s presence might upset Abigail and he feels a tightness in his chest. “What if you helped her and I took the fall for it? Hannibal might be mad at me for it, but he’s less likely to lash out at me than you.”

Abigail’s eyes go wide. “Really? You’d do that for me?”

“Hell, I owe you for what happened in Minnesota. I was scared as hell when I couldn’t find you after I woke up back in Baltimore and I can’t imagine how much worse it musta been for you.”

Abigail sticks her hand out for him to shake. “Deal. Now, wanna hear my plan?”

Chapter End Notes

Merry (almost, for me) Christmas, if you celebrate it. "Why, Graham, are you posting on a Friday?" you might be asking. Fair. Well, this past semester told me that with the way my schedule was set up, updating on Wednesdays was hard to keep track of. This semester I scheduled in a similar manner so that I have no classes on Fridays (cheers to increased flexibility provided by going to college!) and so I decided that I'll update on Fridays now! This means that the next update should come on Friday, December 31st. See you all then! :^)

You Have Beautiful Eyes

Chapter Summary

The beginnings of Abigail's plan are set in motion.

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year's eve! Today's chapter title is from OTGW

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Abigail's plan is risky, but Will goes along with it. He wants Abigail to know that he has her back with this, needs to make up for all the times he let Hobbs's twisted love for his daughter shape his actions with her.

First, he calls Jack. He makes sure that Jack knows where his boundaries are and that this time around, Will is gonna treat them as such. Jack seems proud that he's gathered the will to define them in the first place if also annoyed that it interferes with how often he can call on Will. *Only the Ripper,* Will says, *and just until we catch him. If I work on any cases after that, it's because I decide to, and I work normal hours.*

"For Miriam," he huffs, allowing anger to seep into his voice as though he means to keep it hidden, winking at Abigail as he does. "For Abigail Hobbs."

Then, he calls Hannibal. When he answers, he sounds pleased to hear from Will so soon. "Will? You're just in luck, my next patient won't arrive for another fifteen minutes," he greets almost as soon as he picks up.

"Hi, Doctor Lecter, Hannibal. I, ah, wanted to ask about our *plans* , y'know? When do you think it'll be ready?"

Hannibal catches on immediately, huffing out a laugh. Will fills the space created by his missing presence in the room by imagining how his eyes crinkle in the corners when he's pleased. "I was thinking everything should be all wrapped up by the weekend. Perhaps on this upcoming Wednesday, I could take you to the opera house, I have an extra ticket."

"Next Wednesday? I'm not sure about that. Is there any way we could go sooner?"

"For you, my darling?" Will blushes at that, Abigail giving him a cheeky look as Hannibal's voice purrs from his phone's speakers. "I'm sure it could be arranged. Does Sunday evening work for you instead?"

Sunday, five days from now. "That sounds perfect, Hannibal. If you're free after your last session, maybe you could swing by again and we could talk more about the opera thing."

"That sounds perfect to me. My first appointment doesn't start until noon tomorrow, so I can spare the time in the morning for the extra drive. I can be there with dinner by 8, I believe."

Abigail wiggles her eyebrows at Will and he coughs, turning his face away to ignore her shenanigans. "I'll see you then." Before he hangs up, he adds, "Thank you, Hannibal."

"It's no problem at all, dear Will."

He hangs up, desperately trying to ignore the look Abigail keeps sending him. "What did I say? Magical soulmates!" She sobers up quickly, a teasing grin dropping from her features as her brows furrow. "You make him different; he is simultaneously calmer and more emotional when it comes to you.

"I think, one day, maybe it will be safe for you to care about someone other than him without feeling too violently jealous, but I know that right now I'm not ever gonna be fully safe if I hang around. No matter how much I listen or how well you behave, I'm still a tool to gain your affection and isolate you from everyone else. If I stay, I'd have to watch out for the day that my use runs out and the only thing Hannibal can do is try and keep me from you, too."

It hurts for Will to acknowledge, but she's right. If he wants to make sure Abigail survives Hannibal, the best thing he can do is help her get away. And he doesn't just want her safe, he wants her happy. That requires her plan going well, so he pats her shoulder and lifts himself off the couch to head to the door.

"If he visits before this is finished, don't lie. If he asks you a question, answer it to the best of your ability and move on. He's clever; he'll know immediately if you're lying or trying to misdirect him. You have a phone?" When she nods, he continues. "Good. If that happens and you're forced to give anything away, or you feel at all nervous that he's catching on, call me and I'll fix it. No more shitty father figures are gonna make you fear for your life if I have anything to say about it."

That gets him a laugh, the stress seeping from her shoulders as she relaxes for what could be the first time since Hobbs used her to kill his first victim. "Stay safe, Will. He won't kill you but he sure as hell knows how to make it hurt. You'll get the tickets then? You have my secret email; send 'em to me there. Thank you, Will." She startles him by wrapping him in a hug and as desperately as he wants it to last he can't have too much of his scent or Hannibal's cologne rubbing off on her.

He gently pries her arms from his waist, patting her shoulder again stiffly. "Keep me updated, yeah? It'll be hard enough to keep you safe from a different continent, don't go radio-silent on me too. And wash this outfit as soon as I'm gone, shower twice. Super sniffer, remember?"

She nods, eyes flitting away from his face when she notices how close to crying he is. "Don't worry, Will. Everything will be fine. Now get out of here, you've got a date to plan." she gently shoves him towards the door, sending him one last nervous smile as she closes the door between them.

He waves at the house as he gets back in his car, not sure if she even sees him but not minding either way. He has a very short period to get to Baltimore and return the cologne and then get back to his house before Hannibal shows up.

~

Dinner, as it turns out, is Hannibal-slang for a six-course meal. It's delicious and Will feels a hint of lingering guilt at not feeling guilty about who likely has ended up on his plate. It's too damn delicious and Will's mostly given up on pretending that he was ever a good person.

It helps that whenever he gets lost in his thoughts, the judging voice creeping in and distracting himself from their meal, Hannibal swoops in with some sort of physical contact. Like before he was incarcerated, there's lots of shoulder-touching and hands grazing his waist and the small of his back, but even more pleasingly hand-holding has become just as common.

Will is baffled to reemerge from his head once more and come to terms with the sensation of Hannibal's thumb mindlessly tracing figure eights across his knuckles, their fingers twining together in a way he hasn't done since his first girlfriend in high school.

It's fucking fantastic. He hates to break the peace but this conversation needs to happen. For Abigail.

"What's your plan with Chilton?"

Hannibal squints at him and though the rest of his face remains unchanged, Will gets the feeling he's pleased, like a contented cat. "There will be a display that will be set up on Wednesday evening when he is home alone. This will have trace samples of a bacteria that is only found in a very particular section of Virginia, where Miriam Lass will be placed soon. Miriam will further implicate Chilton when she is found, though other evidence will provide enough justification for a search warrant for Chilton's house, where authorities will discover his next intended victim."

Will hums, pretending to consider the plan. Eventually, he sighs deeply. "Let me help. I can have dinner with Chilton that night, make sure he stays in. When Jack comes to question me about Chilton's alibi, I'll play the fool. Switch the times around a bit, mention that he seemed off, that sort of thing. It'll implicate him further before they even find Miriam."

Hannibal lifts their still conjoined hands to sweetly kiss Will's knuckles. He feels fluttery, a tingly feeling in his chest. He feels like he's being courted. It's heady, the knowledge that he is so deeply desired by another human being. It gives him the courage to continue.

“I want to help you. I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to do the things you do, and with no remorse, but I don’t want to stop you. And, if it weren’t for me, you wouldn’t even be in Jack’s line of sight, though distantly as it is. I have to protect you. I can’t lose you.”

“And you won’t, mylimasis.” Will’s barely finished speaking by the time Hannibal speaks up. “The only way they could catch me is if you were leading them.”

His confidence both in Will’s intellect and Hannibal’s skill makes him go warm, eyes rolling. “I would give you shit for being so full of yourself if it weren’t reasonable. You know what you’re doing and the FBI just can’t compete with your level of careful precision. That being said, you might be watched more closely after this; it might be best to lie low for a little. No grand displays, at least not anywhere nearby.”

“Hm, yes that seems more than reasonable. Is Cuba far enough?”

Will’s free hand darts out to desperately grab at Hannibal’s silk shirt. “You can’t just leave me,” he growls.

Hannibal hardly reacts, besides gently gripping Will’s hand in his own and prying his fingers loose, only to tangle their fingers together once he’s free. “I would never dream of such a thing.”

“Then--” Will cuts himself off when he realizes what he means, Hannibal’s face blooming into a wide grin. “Oh. *Oh,* Hannibal. You’d want to? With me? Cause, I mean at that point, there are no take-backs. You’re stuck with me until you ship me somewhere else.”

“And you’d be stuck with me. How terrible,” Hannibal sighs dramatically, winking when Will pulls one set of their clasped hands towards him to nip at Hannibal’s fingers playfully.

The placement of their hands on the table forces Hannibal to lean forward a little for comfort and Will takes the opportunity to press a kiss onto his lips. Hannibal leans into the table further, allowing Will better access. For a moment, they continue kissing, close-mouthed and

gently. Will pulls away to take in Hannibal's blown pupils and soft lips before he dives back in, licking the seam of Hannibal's mouth to encourage him to open.

He does and Will soon takes Hannibal's bottom lip between his teeth, nibbling at it. He suddenly bites down, drawing blood and a moan from Hannibal. Will licks at the wound before focusing on Hannibal's tongue, licking the flavors of their dessert from his mouth.

Hannibal pulls back, panting. He can't go far because one of Will's hands has separated from Hannibal's and tangled in his shirt again, Hannibal's own freed hand tightly gripping the curls on the back of Will's head.

"I find myself distracted by your promise for revenge. How am I to know for certain that you are not using my feelings for you for your own gain, luring me into a trap that ends in my imprisonment?" He whispers, brows drawn low as he tries to maintain eye contact instead of staring at Will's lips.

"I've been in love with you since you killed Budge. I did promise revenge but the last thing I want is for you to be stuck out of my reach, at least for a prolonged time. I will make you suffer, know this, but I want to be able to watch every moment of it. I want to see you realize that you're so dependent on my presence that you'd forgive me, no matter what I do to you. And, I want you to come out of it mostly whole, so that you may look upon our previous transgressions and know that we can move on from them.

"I want to be happy, Hannibal. And damn whatever made us this way, but *you* make me happy. You could. When one of us fucks up and threatens that happiness, they get punished, and then we move on. Can we do that?"

"You would not leave me." Will shakes his head. "You aim for a level of understanding that we do not currently have. To forgive is, to an extent, an unconscious decision. Could you forgive the harm I have inflicted upon you after your scheme?"

"I am certain of it. You're on the path to forgiveness, Hannibal. You just need to prove to me that I should make the conscious effort to not resent you for what you did, allow me to do what needs to be done for the slate to be wiped clean," Will assures.

Hannibal nods, looking out the windows to the front yard. “I want to be happy with you, Will, for however long you allow it. I cannot begrudge you the need for assurance in my dedication to you, nor can I for the desire to create balance by getting revenge. If you had sent Mr. Brown to kill me instead of spying on me, I would’ve eventually taken the opportunity to send someone after you.”

Will huffs a laugh, pulling Hannibal from his seat and leading them to the bed. “You already did. You don’t think I can’t tell what you intended by sending me to Budge’s place? Either I proved my worth or he killed me and you could move on.”

Hannibal shucks his jacket and waistcoat off, folding them delicately. Then, he adds his pants and shirt to the pile, leaving him in just a white undershirt and dark blue silk briefs. When Will is equally as undressed, he tugs him on top of him on the bed, arms snug around his waist.

Will huffs into Hannibal’s chest, wiggling to get more comfortable before tossing the blanket over the two of them.

Hannibal draws his attention by tilting his chin up with two fingers. “You never cease to amaze me, clever boy. Sleep well, I’ll be up with breakfast before I have to leave.”

Will kisses Hannibal’s clavicle and lets his eyes slip closed, falling asleep soon after Hannibal’s breathing slows.

The next morning, Will has breakfast with Hannibal again, this time without any interruptions from nosy (ex) girlfriends. He feels almost content, basking in the warmth of the heater while snuggled up in the blanket Hannibal wrapped around his shoulders as soon as he crawled out of bed, surrounded by his dogs, Hannibal, and the scent of good food. He hates that he’s hiding something from Hannibal, even if it is for his own good.

Hannibal notices the slight distance he puts between them, unsurprisingly. He only encourages Will to talk with a raised eyebrow and a supportive hand on his neck, easily backing off when Will mumbles *I’ll tell you later.* It’s an astounding show of trust on Hannibal’s part, and Will feels warm thinking about it.

To reward Hannibal's good behavior, he drags the man into his lap when he tries to stand to take their dishes to the kitchen. Hannibal accepts with a laugh, sitting sideways so he can sling one arm around Will's shoulders, the other buried in his hair after he sets their plates back on the table with a loud *thunk.*

"You've never been so open with providing physical contact, I'm almost concerned," Hannibal teases, tugging at the curls on the back of Will's skull so he's forced to stare up at him.

"Hm, yeah. I'm still much better at taking it than giving it." Will pauses, catching the double entendre. "Oh, hell, I didn't mean it like that. Just--please forget I said anything." He buries his face in Hannibal's sleep shirt, the one he borrowed from Will, one of the larger shirts he bought for layering.

Will can feel Hannibal's cheeky grin pressing into his scalp. Still, his voice remains mostly devoid of humor. "Emotional and physical intimacy are new for you, something you had resigned yourself to never having. They are, to some extent, dependent on a level of openness that you had, until this point, never imagined that you would allow yourself with another. Does it shock you to know that that aspect of our relationship, even before now, surprised me?"

"What do you mean?"

"I love my sister wholeheartedly, with my entire being. In my youth, I had dedicated my energy and focus into providing her happiness and, though I will never know for certain, I suspected that she was too different from me to ever fully understand my predilection for violence as an art form.

"After her death, I eventually found myself in the care of my Aunt Murasaki. I could sense that she had some darkness in her as well, and in the foolishness that comes with youth, I allowed my love for her to hide the fact that she merely tolerated my particular brand of cruelty. I allowed it to sneak up on me, and I saw her rejection of me as a betrayal. From then on, I knew that I was destined to be alone, for no one could ever match my darkness.

"And then I found you, mylimasis. Your hidden desires, so close to breaking through the surface, your wit, your *rudeness,* I was entranced. I have never found a mind so equal to my

own, never before have I felt such a strong pull to worship anything as I do you. I spent so long emulating God to challenge His might that I find myself fumbling when in the presence of your wrath."

Will reaches up to cling to Hannibal's face and shoulders, forcing eye contact. Though his words were spoken with such fervor that Will could not doubt them, and the memories he's seen have done nothing to prove them wrong, the unadulterated adoration in Hannibal's gaze sends his world spinning. "I love you, too, Hannibal."

Hannibal's eyes widen and suddenly he's blinking violently, tears filling his eyes. His face goes slack, devoid of emotion outside of the rivulets of tears still streaming down his face. Will pulls him down, allowing him to bury his face into his shirt and cry.

He knows it's fucked up but Will feels a thrill at being able to pull such a strong reaction from the unwavering cover of Hannibal's mask. His eyes dampen in sympathy but he does not allow them to fall; this is Hannibal's moment to come to terms with how much Will has changed him, he will not detract from that.

After a few minutes, Hannibal pulls back enough to study Will. "Occasionally, I drop a teacup to shatter on the floor. Curiosity, a need for destruction, perhaps, drives me. All I focus on is the disappointment when I find that it hasn't gathered itself back together. Perhaps, one day it will."

"A teacup can't fix itself, Hannibal. The only thing that can fix it is a person dedicated enough to glue it together again. Kintsugi only works if the teacup can't fix itself. Craftsmen mend the wounds of time, sealing the cracks with gold until something unique and beautiful takes its place. But you can't predict how it will turn out. Kintsugi requires a certain level of adaptability. Are you willing to adapt to the changes that will be made when the teacup is made anew?"

Hannibal is silent. Will hopes, for all their sakes, that he can manage to adapt to the changes Will has made to his plans behind his back.

~

It’s devastatingly easy to convince Chilton to invite him to dinner. He goes to the BSHCI, stays out of sight of the (few) cameras, and waltzes right into his office.

After Chilton manages to collect himself, he blurts out: “What on Earth are you doing here? I’d’ve thought that since you managed to weasel your way out of here, you’d be smart and stay as far away as possible.”

Will sighs, acting put-upon and gruff. “Don’t be an idiot, Frederick. We both know it’s only a matter of time before the Ripper slips away, and it’s not like I can get away with murder in a building where my every action is monitored closely. *You* are uniquely qualified to sway a jury in the right direction. You’ve known Hannibal for nearly a decade, you’ve seen how he operates. You know him better than most in your field.”

Chilton preens. “Well, of course, I am! I saw how he manipulated you into practically confessing to his crimes. He’s just too intelligent of an opponent for you, you simply *had* to reach out to me.”

Will has to desperately smother his desire to roll his eyes. “Yeah, whatever. Could we brainstorm tonight, combine our efforts and I can share the plan the FBI’s cobbled together so far for capturing him. Only, Doctor Lecter might be watching my house still, so maybe it’s best we reconvene at your place so no one sees us meet.”

Chilton nods, using his cane as leverage so he can stand. He shuffles through a side drawer on his desk and pulls out a pad of paper and a ballpoint pen that’s pathetically disguised as a fountain pen. He slips the top sheet off and writes his address and a time on it, sliding it to Will. “Here’s my address. Do make sure you aren’t being followed when you show up, yes?” He raises one eyebrow condescendingly.

Will just nods, turning to leave as he slips the paper into his jacket pocket. He leaves the same way he came, slipping from blind spot to blind spot, unseen and untrackable. On the way home, he swings by Hannibal’s to steal one of his sets of car keys so he can make a copy before he heads to Chilton’s for dinner. He leaves a note on his bedside table, scrawled handwriting telling Hannibal to invite Alana to dinner on Friday with the two of them.

He spends the next few hours passing the time by fixing up a lure for Bev, hoping she really will take him up on his offer of a fishing trip, just the two of them. He sends her a photo of the in-progress lure and a couple of Buster trying to climb inside the fridge to get to a bag of chicken feet for the dogs. Bev lets him know that the body that dropped on the day of his release from the BSHCI likely *wasn't* the Chesapeake Ripper, to Jack's disappointment.

When he's ready to leave he drives to Hannibal's again. He leaves his car in the driveway where it's easy to spot, then he makes his way to the garage. He drives the SUV to Chilton's parking a street away and walks the rest of the distance. He knocks on the back door and waits for an answer.

Chilton swings the door open. He's in the same outfit as before, a suit tailored to his form handsomely but tempered by the gaudy and clashing patterns. "Good evening. Let's get started, shall we?"

Will is led to a modern, open floor home to the dining table. Two ceramic plates are set up already, one at the head and one to the left of it. Chilton makes his way to the head of the table and settles in before Will can sit down.

"Jack wants me to get close, use myself as a lure to trick Doctor Lecter into slipping up and giving me just enough to get a search warrant; from there, we'll find all the evidence we need in his house."

"And what will I do?" Chilton asks. Will can see that he wants the investigation into him to be over with, but he's afraid of getting close enough to find himself under a killer's scalpel again.

"Your part will be minor, but important. You've got to see if he can host a dinner party so Jack's team can sneak samples for the lab."

Chilton goes pale at the reminder of the Ripper's penchant for cannibalism. He struggles to eat some more as the silence grows around them.

He rushes the rest of their dinner, practically tossing Will out the door when they've finished. Will would be pissed at the wasted time, but Hannibal has displayed Isley somewhere and Chilton's alibi is crumbling apart even as he impatiently bids Will goodbye before slamming the door in his face. It's almost amusing how afraid of Hannibal Chilton is.

Will drops off the SUV, slinking into Hannibal's study where the light emanating from the room leads him. He finds Hannibal drawing at his desk. He looks up as Will walks in, his eyes scrunching happily at the sight of him. Will had dressed up, not for Chilton but because he knew he'd be seeing Hannibal again and there's a part of him that's still desperate for his approval. He knows the dark green button-up, sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and the form-fitting black trousers were a good idea by the way Hannibal's nostrils flare as he scans him from head to toe.

"Have you finished meddling today, mylimasis?"

Will grins, teeth bared with violence and mischief. "Never. Whiskey?" He doesn't wait for a response before he grabs the most expensive-looking bottle from the alcohol cabinet and pours two fingers each into two glasses. "I hope that by now you're well aware that whatever you've got planned is completely at the mercy of my own whims. You'll do as I say."

Hannibal nods gratefully as Will hands him a glass of whiskey. "And if I don't?" It's not a threat, merely him exploring a curious train of thought.

"You won't," Will counters confidently. "You'll be good for me when I want you to be. You're smart enough to know when a line I draw is up to prying and when a boundary is just that." He tangles Hannibal's tie between his fingers, tugging on it to tighten around his throat until it's uncomfortably snug.

When Hannibal leans into his directioning he lets the tie slip from his grasp. "For now, I'll use you as my weapon. I point you in a direction and tell you to fire and you do as I say."

"And what happens afterward?" Hannibal pointedly doesn't fix the tie.

Will raises a single eyebrow, settling onto the desk beside him. "We'll paint the world red with blood. What's this?" Will taps the drawing in front of Hannibal, silently asking

permission to snoop.

“I made it with you in mind. You may look; anything that is mine is yours.”

Will grabs the drawing, twisting his wrist awkwardly to look at it from the right angle. When he processes the image his eyebrows creep up to his hairline. “Is this supposed to be my ass?” He flips the paper towards Hannibal accusatorily.

Hannibal’s eyes twinkle in the low light. “I often find inspiration drawing you.”

“And in how many of those am I naked?”

“Maybe half,” Hannibal chirps.

“Yeah, well. I actually have a dimple right… here.” He points to a spot near his right hip. “So your drawing’s totally unrealistic.”

Hannibal’s pupils are blown, nearly enveloping all of the brown in his irises. “Would you assist me in fixing my anatomical mistakes? You’d make such a lovely model.”

Will leans back, enjoying the way Hannibal sways forward before he slams to a halt, realizing what he’s done. He taps his chin with a finger, considering. “Hm, if you tell me that you’ve already scheduled our dinner with Alana for Friday as I asked you to in my note, then you can draw me.”

“Wonderful. I notified her as soon as I saw it. Dinner starts at six, semi-formal attire, please. I have a suit that I think you’d look dashing in, if you’d allow me to dress you for the occasion. Now, if you’d please get comfortable. Dress up or down to your desire, and sit with your arms supporting your head on the arm of the chaise here,” he directs.

Will grins, unbuttoning his shirt down to his navel and slipping his socks and shoes off. Feeling daring, he slides his belt from the loops and wiggles out of his pants, leaving him in his boxers and shirt. He allows Hannibal to maneuver him into a position he likes, settling down when he finally moves away and settles at his desk to begin working.

He sits there for hours, elbows growing achy with how long he holds the position but unwilling to move lest he disrupt Hannibal. He eventually slips into Hannibal's mind palace, wandering aimlessly through the halls and glancing at whatever memory he happens to summon before quickly moving on. Distantly, he feels Hannibal's gaze bore into him as he studies his figure, replicating what he sees on paper.

He ends up staying the night, the both of them too tired to do much more than toss their clothing aside and snuggle in bed, tangled together in a heap of limbs.

Chapter End Notes

See you all next year :P

Here We are, The Two of Us

Chapter Summary

Will continues to meddle, and a new enemy is introduced. And, potentially, a new ally.

Chapter Notes

The chapter title is, once again, from OTGW!
This chapter has references to, but no explicit, sex scenes. Nothing much spicier than what's been in previous chapters, I don't think, but I still updated the tags in case.
I meant for the dinner with Alana to happen in this chapter, but I got very carried away! Next week, though, definitely! I also remembered to edit this for the first time since chapter 9 (oops X[ ). Fun fact, in this chapter, Grammarly wanted me to change "tight hold" to "tight hole." Ya nasty, grammarly

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will goes to see Jack in the morning. He waltzes through Quantico, no one blinking at his presence. It's as though none of them had, even just a week ago, thought he was a confused serial killer.

Jack is in his office. He looks up as the door swings open, eyebrows raising as Will enters. If he had cared to, Will might've called ahead to alert the man to his impending arrival. But he hadn't, so Will just flops into one of the chairs on the other side of Jack's desk.

"I think we both know what must be done to lure the Ripper into slipping up. His ego comes first; if we direct media attention away from the Ripper kills then he'll take it personally. The Ripper has a favorite journalist, and as physically painful it is to even consider, making a deal with the devil is our most direct option," Will begins. He doesn't have his glasses, doesn't need them anymore. He makes eye contact and doesn't force himself into blinking more frequently to comfort Jack. He stares unrelentingly at him.

"You want to work with Freddie Lounds to hype up other killers?"

“I don’t want to, but we know the Ripper follows Tattlecrime. She’s our best bet.” Will sighs.

Jack leans forward. “I need to hear it from you: who is the Ripper?”

This is it, his last chance to turn back. “Frederick Chilton has the motive and the opportunity. He was on the case two years ago, he was in close proximity to Miriam and he had the chance to alter the profile. The two people framed for his crimes were under his care for extended periods.

“Hannibal is our friend, hell, Alana’s known him for nearly a decade. He is a genuinely well-adjusted member of society, not a well-constructed mask. He is proud, but not egocentric. Confident, but not narcissistic. The Ripper is not capable of loving someone in a healthy way, but Hannibal *loves* me. And I love him. He’s not the man you’re looking for.” Will allows a hint of passion to infect his tone.

Jack nods, like Will only confirmed his suspicions. *Good.* Will has been working to redirect the FBI’s attention from Hannibal to their scapegoat. “So will you personally be working on these other cases, ‘til we catch this bastard?”

Will nods. The bits and pieces he managed to scavenge in the BSHCI were not nearly enough to satisfy his cravings. He’s practically giddy at the thought of going back into the field, now that he’s being honest with himself. It’ll never be enough, not really, but Will suspects that he’ll glut himself on violence soon enough. A few months ago, he knows, he would’ve been unnerved by this line of thought, but he’s spent too long in Hannibal’s head, too long forced to face his darkest desires that it’s impossible to feel any concern now.

“Wonderful. We’ve got two animal attacks for you to look at. They were given to us by Maryland police because they don’t check any of the normal boxes for an animal attack. No predation, body where it was killed, one of ‘em was unusually close to a populated area.” Jack slides a folder across the desk and Will flips through the CSI photos.

One after the other, the photos show a predator attacking mercilessly with the only outcome being a release of instincts. The first, Will struggles to imagine the full scope of since on its own it looks just like an odd rabid wolf attack. The second, though, reveals more.

It's a couple, torn apart on what looks like a peaceful date in the woods. Will feels the killer, fragments and whisps slowly forming to create a larger sense of a beast in the wrong skin. He closes his eyes.

It's waiting, watching. It holds back until the perfect moment until the smaller one is distracted and facing away from the woods where it lurks. My hold releases, and it springs forward, hungry not for flesh and bone and muscle but for screams and destruction. It massacres them, plays with the smaller one for a moment before slicing through her delicate throat with its fangs. So powerful, such a feat of nature and creation. Teeth, once more allowed to do what teeth were made for.

Will opens his eyes, slips out of the killer's head like the beast slides out of his tight hold. "This is a man, one who believes he is supposed to be an animal, a predator. This destruction is on par with a bear, or a wolf, but he doesn't work with animals, not living ones. They would taunt him because they get to be what he was supposed to be, unwaveringly, unjudged for their nature. But, they fascinate him from a distance."

"Zeller and Price are analyzing the bite marks, trying to figure out what could do this sort of damage. Maybe he has fake fangs or a suit."

"The teeth should give him away, I'm sure of it. I'll head down to the lab, see them and Bev." Will groans as he stands from the stiff chair.

The lab is chilly, as usual. He pulls Hannibal's jacket tighter around his shoulders, buttoning it up to mid-chest. Bev is researching something at her computer while Price and Zeller bicker over the skull they're hunched over.

Bev swivels around in her seat. "Damn, Graham. New jacket?"

Will snorts. "New boyfriend."

Bev gapes at him. "You got your hot doctor? What about Alana?"

Will ignores how Zeller stares confusedly at him. Instead, he eyes the three sets of skulls on a table. “They broke up. The skulls for the new case?”

“We were comparing bite radiuses of the most common bear and wolf species to the injuries on the bodies,” Price chirps. “It doesn’t match any of ‘em. You wanna guess what it *does* match?”

Will shrugs.

“Cave bear. They went extinct around 24,000 years ago, so it’s not a prime suspect here,” Zeller butts in.

Price elbows him before he continues for him. “The cave bear doesn’t even have the jaw strength to do the kind of damage we’re seeing here. They’re probably primarily herbivorous.”

So, we’re thinking someone made a suit with a skull that is *very* hard for a citizen to get their hands on,” Bev finishes.

Will nods, unsurprised. This is, after all, essentially what he told Jack, without the specifics. “Anybody up for a trip to the museum?”

Will rides with Bev while Zeller and Price go in their own car. Divide and conquer. He and Bev end up at the Natural History Museum, the building looming darkly over them in what light escapes through the dark clouds.

Bev flashes her badge at the receptionist and the nervous employee rushes to lead them to the director’s office.

A woman sits at her desk, on a phone call. Her dark hair is cut short, tight curls close to her scalp. The long, white sleeves of her cardigan are rolled up to mid-forearm as she frantically takes note of what's being said on the phone. She hangs up soon after, redirecting her attention to the trio standing quietly on the other side of her desk.

"Sorry about that, folks. I'm Camila, we spoke on the phone. You must be Agents Katz and Graham. Why don't you sit? Ali, you can leave now, thank you." The receptionist dips their head and darts out the door, closing it behind them.

"We're here because we suspect that one of your artifacts is being used in a string of murders that resemble animal attacks. Do you have a technician who cares for the ancient animal skeletons, specifically that of your cave bear?" Bev questions.

Camila presses her lips together. "There's one guy who works with them most, Randall Tier. He's worked here for a few years now but he was just given permission to perform maintenance on them without surveillance. He's replacing an old employee who'd been doing it for decades. He's here now if you want to ask him any questions." She pauses, considering. "Do you think he's killed anyone?"

"We can't know for certain yet, but that is a potential that we're looking into, yes," Will says and she grimaces.

"Well, I'll escort you to the right place."

She leads them to an employees-only door on the first floor. There, several partly-finished displays are scattered across the area, only a handful being full skeletal remains. A young man sits on the floor, screwing a leg bone back onto its frame, a collection of cleaning products set on a table nearby. He reaches for another bone to detach and clean before he notices their presence.

"Camila. Who're they?"

Camila wrings her hands. "This is agent Beverly Katz and Special Agent Will Graham from the FBI. They want to ask you some questions if you're available." She excuses herself and

heads back, leaving the door they came through cracked slightly.

“Do you ever work on the cave bear display here?” Will steps closer.

Randall nods. He wipes his hands off on a dirty rag he grabs off the floor beside him. He pushes himself up, and there’s something about the arch of his shoulders, the tension in his spine, that just *screams* predator. It’s the only thing Will can feel, the sweet temptation to spill blood.

“I’ve been working on the main one, the backup set is what’s on display right now. We cycle them relatively frequently so the screws don’t rust and keep the dust to a minimum. They might fall apart otherwise.”

Beverly nods kindly. “We’ll keep this short then so you can get back to work. Do you know of anyone with access to the remains who have any engineering skills?”

“No one, besides me, that I know of.” Randall’s eyes track Will as he meanders the array of half-finished displays. Will can feel his gaze heavy on his back even when he turns away from him.

Will approaches what looks like the hulking figure of the cave bear, lower jaw fixed in place but the top of the skull missing. “These teeth are impressive.”

“Yes. Fangs preserved over millennia still sharp enough to do what they were evolved to.”

Will quirks an eyebrow at that. “Chew through roots? Cave bears, if they ate meat at all, were still likely primarily herbivores. And cannibals, feeding on those who didn’t survive hibernation,” He adds.

Bev gives him a look. He just shrugs. He’ll tell her he did a quick google in the car later.

Randall shakes his head violently like he's trying to shake Will's words from his head. "Doesn't matter now, they're all dead. Maybe they all died out because they didn't use their teeth the way they should've."

"Hundreds of species of megafauna went extinct with the slow end of the Ice Age, it wasn't a failing of cave bears specifically. Direwolves, sabertooth tigers, wooly mammoths. They were built for a specific climate, they just couldn't evolve fast enough to compete." Will turns to Beverly. "I think we're done here."

She nods. They'll trade notes in the car, but he suspects she also thinks Randall is their guy. Bev thanks Randall for his time while Will shoves the door the rest of the way open.

Bev waits until they've settled in the car to speak. "Okay, that guy definitely did it, right?" She continues when Will nods. "Alright. I'll let Jack know when we get back, see if he thinks asking the Director for permission to test the skull is a good idea."

"Why can't we do it now?"

"Higher-ups have been hesitant to let investigations go without monitoring the big stuff since… well since you got falsely imprisoned."

"Ah, yeah, that'll do it." Will grimaces. He turns the heater up full blast.

"So, how long have you and the Hot Doctor been together?"

"Subtle," Will snorts, elbowing her teasingly. "Tuesday."

"Tuesday?" She splutters. "You were out of prison less than 24 hours and this man ditches his girlfriend for you?"

“Yep,” He says, popping his lips to enunciate the ‘p’. “Doin’ what we should’ve from the beginning. I love him, Bev, and I know he loves me, though he’s too shy to say it.”

“That man has never been shy a day in his life!”

Will nods, tilting his head to one side in concession. “Not shy, no. Hopefully hesitant is better. He’s been alone for most of his life; you can’t tell me that there’s any substance to those rich assholes he surrounds himself in. He doesn’t have very many friends, but he’s got you, and Alana, and Jack, and me and my pack now. He just doesn’t have any expectations because he’s worried that he’ll grow attached and then we’ll leave him.”

Bev pats him on the shoulder, suite for a moment. “He’ll find his way to your little dream-sharing thing eventually.”

Will didn’t know that he needed the reassurance until the tension seeps from his shoulders and he slumps forward. “I know, I know, it’s just… what if he doesn’t? What if he finds someone better that he connects with like that and I’m just… left behind, stuck in his head forever?”

“Talk to him about it soon, spill the beans and try to manually bridge the gap. The worst that’ll happen is that you’ll find out that you’re special and he’s physically incapable of reciprocating. That man is head over heels for you, Graham, he’s not gonna ditch you ‘cause you’re a little weirder than expected.”

Will chuckles, grinning at Bev. “Thanks. Hey, how’s it going with Molly? That’s her name, yeah?”

“Oh, man! It’s great. She’s got this kid, about nine now, he’s pretty cool. Molly’s just started dating again since her husband died, but she doesn’t talk about it much. She made us dinner one night, she’s a terrible cook! I teased her for it and we ordered takeout but her smile… I mean, it just lights up the room.”

Bev continues rambling for a while, eventually heading back to Quantico. “Hey, maybe we could do a double date of sorts one day,” She says suddenly.

“Trying to introduce her to your work-family before getting to the real family?” Will teases.

“Yeah, well, no. You *are* family, you know that, right? I mean, I’m not this close with Zeller or anything.”

“Shit, Bev. You–you’re family too. The dumb little sister I never had.” She grins at that.

“Damn it, Will! If I weren’t driving, I’d kick you out of my car right now.” Her tone is harsh but the fake punches she distractedly sends his way assures him that she isn’t the slightest bit mad.

He’s grinning wildly and he realizes this is the first time in a long time that he has a family. And he’ll do anything to keep it together this time.

“Speaking of work-family, what was up with Zeller this morning?”

Bev glances at him, humming. “Oh, he had the biggest crush on you when you first joined the team.” At Will’s disbelieving scoff, she continues. “No, he did! You were so grumpy, though, and the two of you kept butting heads. Jimmy was almost jealous, how much time Brian spent bitching about you in the beginning.”

Will blinks. “Huh.”

~

It’s dark when Will approaches Hannibal’s office. He knows there didn’t use to be a client before him so he’s startled when the door swings open as he’s reaching for the doorknob. A woman, dressed in fine furs—likely real, considering the quality of the coat and the general

rich air that follows her—steps out, eyes darting up to his face when she notices him. He gets the feeling that's the closest to startled she's capable of showing.

"You look familiar; either I know you or I know of you. Which is it?"

Will grimaces. Damn that Freddie Lounds. Damn Hannibal for drawing attention to him. "I'm the guy who didn't kill all of those people."

She nods. "You look oddly chipper for a patient of Doctor Lecter's. Not that his therapy is bad, I just can't imagine anyone would be excited to go to therapy, if they're here for a reason."

"You'd be right, then. Not a patient. It's a friendly visit." He doesn't know how much he can tell a patient of Hannibal's, and at any rate, it isn't much of her business. Will can feel her curiosity seeping into his pores; she hides it well but the way she minutely leans forward, the fact that she hasn't scurried off to the car very obviously waiting for her as it pulls up at the curb, gives it away.

He wants the conversation to end, unnerved by the thought of some random person with the resources to invest in researching him encouraging him to angle his body away from him as he reaches for the door again. He can feel her gaze on his shoulders.

The building is pleasantly warm inside, a welcome respite from the biting chill of the start of winter outside. The door to Hannibal's office from the reception area is open and Will takes it upon himself to enter.

Hannibal sits at his desk, scribbling the last of his patient notes. He glances up as Will enters, smiling softly and holding a finger up to signal that he's nearly finished. Will nods at his downturned head, turning to trail his fingers along the book covers as he scans the shelves on the first floor.

Eventually, he hears the gentle creak of leather as Hannibal slips from his seat. His footsteps are silent and he gives no hint as to where he's headed until his left hand settles on Will's waist. Will leans back into his chest, tilting his head to peer at his face.

Hannibal watches him curiously, and this time the attention is welcome. “Anything catch your eye?”

“Besides you?” Will turns around and loosely clasps his hands behind Hannibal’s back, using the hold to tug them closer together. “I *did* go with Bev to question a suspect today.”

Hannibal quirks an eyebrow at him. “Couldn’t stay out of the field forever, could you?”

“Nah, I mostly just wanted to make sure Jack knew I had limits, now. I’m done hiding from who I am; I know exactly why I wanted to work in the field in the first place.”

“And this killer? How do you see him?”

Will feels the heavy pelt of a predator drape over his shoulders, teeth too big in his mouth. The night grows around him and he succumbs to the instinct that shouts at him to *prowl hunt kill* . He blinks and Hannibal comes back into focus in front of him.

“He is following his instincts, his only issue is that his outsides don’t match the image of what he was supposed to be.”

“He deals with species dysphoria? He has lost his grip on the beast within him.”

No,” Will disagrees, shaking his head. “No, this killer is different, he *is* the beast. He has control over it, he can release his hold on its instincts and regain it at a moment’s notice. He isn’t giving in, he isn’t weak. This is a fusion of sorts, the lines between man and beast blur to the point of nonexistence within him.”

He looks up at Hannibal, taking in the shadow under his cheekbones, the way his pale eyelashes flutter with each blink. He is curious, but not to the extent he usually is when Will discusses a new killer with him.

Will's brow furrows. "You know Randall Tier. Was he a patient of yours?"

Hannibal's face remains unchanged but unfettered pleasure gleams in his eyes. "If he were, I would be violating doctor-patient confidentiality to tell you. I must ask you to take precaution, though. Animals lash out when backed into a corner."

Will slips his hands around Hannibal's waist to rest against his chest for a moment. Then, he gives a gentle shove. "You dick. Ethics violations are the least of your crimes. Keep your secrets, I know he's the one I'm hunting. We're hunting. Don't look at me like that."

He's practically ogling Will now, pride and admiration clear in his gaze. "The hunter becomes the hunted, hm?"

"No, that was… it's not like that." Hannibal pokes his cheek with his nose, inching closer to his mouth. "Stop teasing and kiss me."

Hannibal's breath huffs in a laugh warm on his face. "I'm afraid I cannot reward liars," He sighs wistfully, the ass.

Will tilts his head up to try and steal a kiss anyway, but Hannibal moves away. His hands slip up to gently grasp Will's face, holding him in place. He gives him a pointed look.

"Ugh! Fuck, fine. It's a game, these killers think they're clever enough and I prove them wrong. I outsmart them, I catch them. I'm better than them and I show them that."

"And, when presented with the opportunity, you prove your superiority once more by ending their life."

"That's not all of it, not why I killed Hobbs. I killed him because I wanted to. I wanted to see the life fade from his eyes, and I made it personal by taking his daughter from death's door

and keeping her from him, at least for a moment."

Hannibal presses a kiss to his lips before pulling away. "You are better than them, the ones you catch."

Will chuckles. "Careful, doctor. Your obsession is showing."

"Is that so bad? You and I both know that I live and breathe for you, my mere existence heightened by the knowledge that you are mine and I am yours. I love you, my every thought seems to revolve around you, I will reshape myself to suit your needs."

"Fuck," Will grunts. He flips them around, slamming Hannibal into the bookshelves with his whole weight. He crushes their mouths together, hungrily licking at the seam of his lips. Hannibal parts his lips with a sigh, muffled between them. Will's hands frantically unbutton his waistcoat, tugging his dress shirt out of his pants. His hand slips under the material to settle over Hannibal's heart, fingers curling into his chest hair.

Hannibal desperately grips at his shoulders, eventually gaining the sense to tug the material of Will's borrowed coat off of him. Will frees one hand from Hannibal's shirt to grab at his hand, interlocking their fingers as he presses their hands to the bookshelf above their heads.

They kiss hungrily for a while. Eventually, Hannibal pulls back to flop his head back against the shelves with a thud. "You are going to make it very difficult for me to remain professional during my sessions, all I will be able to think about is how you taste, how you feel against me," he pants.

"Is that an issue?"

Hannibal huffs a laugh, tilting his head down to press kisses across Will's face. "Of course not." His lips attach to Will's neck, biting a trail of bruises across his collarbones.

~

When Will finally gets home, it’s nearly 2 in the morning. He lets the dogs out but they quickly come back in. Will had asked a nearby neighbor to visit the dogs earlier in the day, knowing that he would get home much later than usual when it would be too cold for their paws to stay out for long.

Once everyone has been taken care of, Will strips out of his dress shirt and nice pants, tossing them into the laundry basket as he flops onto the bed. His eyes slip closed and he falls asleep as soon as his head hits the pillows.

He opens his eyes to find himself back in the chapel, the comforting sensation of being near Hannibal overcoming him. He knows, logically, that this place isn’t directly a means of communicating with Hannibal, but it still brings him a quiet sense of peace knowing that everything around him is essentially Hannibal.

Something unusual catches his eye as he starts on his normal wandering route. One of the sticks for lighting candles is laying on one of the tables with votive candles, smoke rising from its tip. A gentle breeze wafts through the building, carrying the scent of smoke with it.

Creeping nearer, Will can see a pile of ash slowly growing as the stick burns. It’s relatively small like it was just set down. Will’s brows furrow.

He notices that a door that he usually ignores—in favor of sticking to his usual routes—is slightly ajar. He pushes it the rest of the way open to find himself back in Hannibal’s office.

“–can’t believe we just did that,” Will’s own voice echoes back at him, joy blatant in his voice as he chuckles. "I'll never think of ladders the same way. You're pretty with your hands all tied up like that."

Will walks around Hannibal’s desk to see them on the floor, where the two of them had been mere hours ago. Hannibal’s head still rests on Will’s bare chest, the two of them lounging on the floor on a blanket that he had carelessly rolled out for them to relax on. Will’s hand is still resting on his lower back.

Both Will and Memory Will ogle Hannibal's toned body. The new memory continues for another moment before ending, but Will's attention is drawn to the client's exit. He walks over, curious at the realization that the doorknob is warm with someone else's heat.

He slowly cracks the door open, just enough to peer into the room. It's Will's house. A glance to the left reveals another memory already half-finished, the last morning Will spent with Hannibal. What shocks him is the fact that two Hannibals are seated facing away from him, gazing lovingly at the Memory Will across the table from them. One, the Hannibal that Will remembers, is clad in Will's borrowed long-sleeve flannel and his own briefs. The other sits in a familiar, dark blue robe.

When Memory Hannibal eventually stands up only to get dragged into Memory Will's lap, the other Hannibal shifts in his seat, his thighs rubbing together. Is this Hannibal watching recent memories involving the two of them for *masturbation material?* Will's face feels embarrassingly warm and he ducks back into the office, gently pulling the door closed again.

Will flops onto the floor, legs sprawled out in front of him. His fingers tap an unconscious pattern on his legs as he thinks. Though he'd noticed signs that, in hindsight, seem like hints that he's accidentally come close to encountering Hannibal wandering his own mind palace—memories ending as he walks into a room, warm door handles, that sort of thing—Will had never considered the potential that he could stumble across Hannibal here.

Curiosity builds within him, and soon he hefts himself up onto his feet and sneaks over to the patient exit again. Slowly swinging the door open, Will surveys the area. The memory has ended already and he watches as Hannibal adjusts the place setting in front of him, activating another memory. He watches as Hannibal watches a memory of himself making breakfast while Memory Will is snuggled up in the bed still, sleeping.

Eventually, Memory Hannibal sits on the edge of the bed and pets Memory Will's hair before returning to the kitchen. Soon after, Memory Will sits up and sleepily wanders into the kitchen. At that point, it's obvious that Hannibal is watching their first morning together, though with seemingly more innocent intentions than with the last memory.

The morning continues to play on, Will watching Hannibal. He simply sits in his chair as the memory comes to a close around him.

Instead of another memory starting, Will is startled when another version of him appears suddenly, without Hannibal seemingly having done anything to summon him. Will can tell something else was going on because the new Will has his entire focus on Hannibal, sitting across the table from him. The two of them sit in silence for a moment as Will watches, unbeknownst to either of them. Will is in the other Will's direct line of sight so it's obvious this is a creation of Hannibal's unconscious, an opportunity for them to speak when they're apart.

The second Will props his elbows on the table, grinning as Hannibal tuts at him. "This isn't the office. Craving domesticity, Doctor Lecter?"

The back of Hannibal's head dips as he nods. "Your house has quickly become more familiar to me than my own home. You're so open here, at ease in a way you aren't anywhere else."

"You want me to be comfortable in your home." Hannibal nods again and the other Will continues. "Though, if you told the real me you might find that he feels the same about you here." His arm sweeps out across his body, gesturing at the room around them.

This imagined Will is right; something inside of Will is soothed at the knowledge that Will's home is quickly becoming Hannibal's home too. The urge to go to Hannibal almost pushes him to reveal himself, but he waits. Perhaps another night.

"It's nearly time for you to move Miriam to the cabin, nearly time for the teacup to come back together."

Hannibal thinks for a moment. Both versions of Will watch him intently. "I do not think the pieces will come together in the same shape, not just reformed and evolved but completely unrecognizable from what I intended for it to be."

The other Will grins viciously. "You think I'm meddling? Heeding my warning, finally."

"Always. My dear Will is quite dedicated to his goal of exacting his revenge on me." His voice is practically dripping with affection and Will scowls. He knows that what he has planned now will overwhelm anything Hannibal could imagine that he'll do, but it's

annoying that they both are almost filled with anticipatory glee. It's not much of a punishment if Hannibal spends the whole time leading up to its reveal practically quivering with excitement.

"It's nearly six, you've got to get going soon."

Hannibal leans forward, crossing one leg over the other and resting his hands on top of his knees. "Yes, alas our time together is coming to an end. It's quite a drive and I have to prepare Miss Lass for the journey."

Will blinks and the two of them vanish. He slips into the room to double-check that Hannibal has left. When he's certain he's in the clear, he sits in Hannibal's seat.

The conversation itself wasn't very revealing, but now Will knows two things: he can physically encounter Hannibal here and Hannibal has conversations with a version of Will, at least on occasion. If given the chance, he might use this as a means of approaching Hannibal to question the dream-sharing with the potential that Hannibal won't know it's really him. Tomorrow, then, he'll make an attempt at communicating with Hannibal here.

After their dinner with Alana.

Chapter End Notes

Shoutout to Will "can't make a 'normal' amount of eye contact to save his life" Graham, Everyone! Mood. I think that when he isn't desperately avoiding eye contact, he's making NTs uncomfortable with the amount of nonstop eye contact he does. Hannibal also does this too and everyone lets him get away with it because he looks fancy and foreign.
See you all next week!
P.S. If anyone is interested in knowing what goes on during the time jump between the scene at Hannibal's office and Will getting home, let me know and I might write it

And Yet, Somehow, We Found Each Other

Chapter Summary

Will gets dressed up for their dinner with Alana.

Chapter Notes

Hello all! Get ready for a Long Chapter because the fluff before Alana shows up is more than 4k on its own! I also hit (and then quickly surpassed) the 100-page mark on my google doc for this fic in this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

On Friday, Will spends the day with his dogs. He takes them with him when he goes fishing; they're well trained enough to know that they can run off and play away from the stream but need to be careful and quiet closer to the banks. He ends up catching four rock bass, each on the smaller side given the dropping temperature but still big enough to make a suitable entrée. He hooks them with a clip through the gills and leaves them tied to a low-hanging branch, still alive in the waters by the shore.

He plays with the dogs in the clearing where they've settled. He learned early on to tire them out before returning home or else he'll be forced to struggle against a horde of hungry, antsy dogs trying to snatch his fish away. Buster managed it once as a puppy, youthful vigor aiding him in launching himself high enough in the air to rip a fish from Will's grasp as he struggled to keep the rest of the pack at bay.

He sends Hannibal a quick text letting him know that their dinner has been caught and is ready for delivery. Hannibal responds with a polite thank you and a reminder to arrive at 4:30 so he has time to prepare the food and get them both ready before Alana arrives.

He takes a quick rinse after the fish have been set aside in a tub with some water to keep them alive until Hannibal needs them, washing away the strongest scents of the stream and fish off of him. He dresses in a simple button-up and black jeans, tucking the ends of his pants into his boots in a way he knows Hannibal hates. He avoids using any cologne, both

because it'll get overwhelmed by whatever cologne Hannibal has chosen for him and because he wants to tempt him by showing up with his scent untarnished by artificial fragrances.

At 2:30 he lets the dogs out one last time, not knowing if he'd be home in time for their usual excursion. By 2:40, he's hefting the tub of fish onto the floor by the passenger seat and driving toward Baltimore, excitement thrumming in his veins.

He isn't looking forward to seeing Alana, knowing that their friendship ended on a discordant note that only he can hear, his aggression at her (former) relationship with Hannibal forcing her to deal with his seemingly unprompted hostility.

He *is* looking forward to seeing Hannibal again. The uncontrollable jitteriness that built within him before each of their sessions half a year ago has returned; he feels almost desperate to be around the man once more, even though they last saw each other less than 24 hours ago. He makes intermittent, high-pitched humming sounds to stay focused on the road ahead of him

He doesn't allow himself to speed, though he wants to. He knows that Hannibal is expecting him at a certain time and he doesn't want to—rightfully—seem too eager by showing up more than half an hour early, and he'd already left sooner than he needed to. So, when he pulls into Hannibal's driveway, next to Hannibal's Bentley—parked out front instead of in the garage, likely to make the house seem more open and welcoming than it would have otherwise—it's nearly 4:15.

He doesn't knock, merely lets himself inside with a soft call to alert Hannibal to his arrival as he slips his shoes off and puts them on the shoe caddy in the coat closet. Hannibal's cheery reply sounds from the kitchen.

"Will, you're here," He chirps.

Will follows the sound of his voice, slipping through the kitchen door to find Hannibal, sleeves of his white dress shirt rolled up to his elbows and donning a black apron, slicing vegetables.

Hannibal glances up at Will as he enters. “I don’t need to have the vegetables prepared ahead of time as nothing in the dinner itself takes more than an hour of prep time but I wanted to make sure I had plenty of time to help you get ready. I decided a headstart wouldn’t ruin anything.”

Will leans against the counter, watching Hannibal’s steady hands swiftly chop leeks. “What’re we having?”

“I couldn’t possibly spoil the surprise before dinner, and certainly not with one of my guests missing,” Hannibal teases.

“Suspicious, but then again I enjoy a bit of suspense every now and again. Keeps me on my toes.”

“It’s best to be surprised on occasion, Will, it keeps life interesting,” Hannibal agrees.

Will huffs a laugh. It’s supposed to get a rise out of him, make him upset that Hannibal is blatantly enjoying the wait leading up to his punishment, but it’s just such a Hannibal move that he only feels serene mirth. “Yes, well, I guess I have another surprise headed my way. I did say I’d let you take care of me, dress me up for dinner tonight. Did you get us matching suits? Something that compliments my eyes? Will you give me a tie or have me leave the collar open?”

Hannibal sets the knife he’s using down and angles the cutting board to pour the leeks into a large pot on the stove, though he leaves the burners off. “It does compliment your eyes. But, I believe the bigger surprise comes before you don the suit. Come, follow me.” He wipes his hands on a towel and hangs his apron on a hook by the door as he leads Will through the house.

Up the stairs, he stops at what Will assumes to be his bedroom door. The sight of familiar dark blue sheets on a massive bed confirms that. Hannibal leads him to the shōji door and into the bathroom.

“Do you have any allergies?”

“Besides pollen? None that I know of,” Will answers warily.

Hannibal nods at his response and begins digging through the under-the-sink storage. “Do you prefer your baths warm or hot?”

“A bath? Seriously, Hannibal?” Will splutters.

Hannibal emerges with his arms full of bath supplies: salts, shampoo and conditioner meant for curly hair, numerous bottles and containers of things Will doesn’t have a clue about what they are.

“Please answer the question, dear,” is the only response he gets.

“Just on the boundary of hot,” Will sighs.

Hannibal taps on the counter with a hand he wiggles free from his pile of supplies. “Sit here please, while I set up. I’ll be adding sake to the bath, which has the effect of both making you and the bath itself warmer and softening your skin and relaxing your muscles. You’re so tense from work that I thought you’d need more than just a nice massage.”

Will raises an eyebrow.

Hannibal, kneeling to start the water, grins over his shoulder. “Worry not, I don’t have the time for that today, though you desperately need one. For now, I’ll have to settle for bathing you and dressing you, though if it’s any consolation it brings me much pleasure that you’ve allowed me to do so.”

Once the bath is started Hannibal makes quick work of preparing it for Will, pouring mixture after mixture into the bathwater and stirring it intermittently with one arm, narrating what

he's adding for Will's benefit. "Salts that smell of chamomile to relax you, oils to soothe your dry hands, some bath honey for bubbles that will make your skin soft."

Will watches him work, assuredly grabbing each package. They're all new, it's painfully obvious that Hannibal has bought all of these and more just for Will's comfort. *Maybe,* he thinks to himself, *he ought to allow Hannibal to take care of him more often.* Purely, of course, because Hannibal enjoys it so much. Not because he enjoys the idea of being pampered, cared for in a way no one has ever done for him before, not even as a child. Or so he tells himself.

When the bath is filled to Hannibal's liking, he stops the water. Standing, he pats the edge of the bathtub with one hand, telling Will silently that he can get in now. As Will slips past him toward the bath, Hannibal begins putting most of the supplies he brought out away.

Will strips, uncaring of the way Hannibal's eyes take in his form appreciatively. He steps into the water and groans as he settles down, the tub large enough that he has more than enough room to stretch his legs out in front of him, toes pointing as he rolls his ankles and feels the joints click and pop.

Hannibal darts past the shōji only to return a moment later with a fluffy pillow. He settles it, and himself on top of it, on the floor beside the tub. Wordlessly, he watches Will.

"I feel better already, thank you." Will watches as a small smile—quite expressive and genuine compared to his usual smiles, though Will has the luck to see these sorts of expressions of his more often—slowly grow as his words sink in.

"I'm glad," Hannibal murmurs. He shifts forward to get a better reach before picking up the bottle of shampoo. "Wet your hair for me?"

Will sinks back enough to duck his head under the water, running his fingers through the damp locks to get them soaked well. When he sits up he shifts to face the wall so Hannibal can massage his scalp with sudsy fingers. It feels nice, especially when his nails lightly scratch and his wrists gently brush his ears to catch any extra shampoo.

Will groans as Hannibal carefully works to untangle a knot of hair at the base of his neck, leaning back into his hands.

“Let me know if I’m hurting you. May I enquire as to your plans for us after your punishment?”

Will considers the question for a moment. “I want… everyone to know you’re mine. Not just our mutual acquaintances, your friends at the opera, your old colleagues, anyone who even thinks of you in passing should think of me as well. We should be interlinked, so inseparable that they cannot think of one without the other. It’s the closest anyone else could get to understanding our bond.”

Hannibal sighs, pleased. He pulls back enough for Will to wash the shampoo off, his hands slipping below the water to card through his hair to make sure he’s done a good enough job. When Will sits up, he squeezes the excess water off and works conditioner through the ends of his hair. “You would not be uncomfortable, with so many eyes on you? I would need to properly engage with the masses for them to know more than basic speculation regarding what we mean to each other.”

Will nods slowly. “I could be your arm candy for a while, stand next to you and nod and grin when you say something that sounds clever but is really insulting and everyone around you laughs because they want your approval. I could be the soft-spoken teacher whom you met through a friend of a friend, who really isn’t used to the fancy outings and lavish outfits but really I think it’s nice to support the local music scene. Or I could be the snarky detective you met when I was working a case and needed your expertise, subtly drawing attention to the flaws of those who flock to please you with news of this charity event’s success or that business deal.”

“I look forward to seeing which sliver of yourself you choose to present each night. Though, I much prefer yourself as you are.”

“Flatterer. It’s not like I’ve got a solid grasp on who I am, half the time. I pick up and drop personality traits and others’ habits like a child picking up leaves on a walk.”

Hannibal’s grip on his hair tightens. “Don’t sound so bleak. The decorations may change at a whim but the foundation remains the same. And, you’ve been more sure of yourself since

you've accepted that you have darker thoughts and urges. Coming to terms with your shifted morality allows you to stand strong against mindsets you encounter."

They sit quietly for a moment, the silence calm as Will digests what Hannibal has suggested. Eventually, Hannibal takes mercy on him and changes the subject.

"Would you allow me to one day spirit you away to a country house of mine, somewhere outside the States? Just the two of us, your dogs, perhaps a nearby body of water that we could walk to for a swim or for you to catch us dinner."

Will imagines it for a while, climbing up a massive staircase leading to the patio of a sprawling mansion in the French countryside. Hannibal would lead him from room to room, giving him a tour as their fingers intertwine, holding hands the entire time. There would be a large backyard, acres of fruit trees blooming with flowers reaching in every direction for as far as the eye can see. The dogs have lots of room to frolic about, a chest filled to the brim with new toys for them to play with seated on the back porch. Every night, Will would snuggle close to Hannibal, and every morning they would wake up tangled together, reaching to be closer to each other even in sleep.

"It sounds like a honeymoon. It-It sounds perfect, Hannibal."

"Would you like it to be a honeymoon?"

"Is this a proposal?"

"I don't believe so, though I would like to know your stance on marriage."

"I didn't ever plan on getting married, at least not primarily to become someone's husband. I do like the idea of being your husband, one day."

"One day?" Hannibal's fingers slow their movements, though Will thinks it isn't intentional.

“Well, I’ve got plans, first,” Will responds.

“Ah, yes. Your mysterious revenge plan. You won’t be ruining any proposals by imprisoning me, will you?”

“Ah, that won’t work on me,” Will tuts, shifting around in the tub to face Hannibal. “It isn’t a surprise punishment if you know what I’ve got up my sleeve.”

“Perhaps a hint? Just to quell my curiosity for–”

With a big splash and a flailing of limbs, Will drags Hannibal headfirst into the bath. His upper body is submerged for a moment before he jerks into a sitting position, coughing water and wiping soap from his eyes.

“I’ll take that as a no. Very well,” he pants. He leans back to rummage under the sink for a medium-sized towel to dry his hair with, pulling his soaked shirt off with a grimace. It flops to the floor with a loud *smack* .

He ruffles his hair with the towel, patting his face dry. When he drops it to his lap to glare half-heartedly at Will, Will bursts into laughter at the sight of him. His eyes are red-rimmed from the soapy water, his hair damp and sticking out at all angles. He’s actually pouting, lips turned down in a sad moue.

Hannibal quirks an eye at him, only serving to fuel Will’s raucous laughter. Eventually, he sighs, glancing down at the towel in his lap before returning his gaze to Will, eyes now alight with pure affection.

As Will’s hiccuping laughter dies down, Hannibal grabs a handful of his hair and tugs him forward, slowly and sensually kissing him. Will is quick to respond, slotting their lips together and dragging his tongue across Hannibal’s bottom lip.

Will is overwhelmed by such a strong sensation of hopeless adoration that his next breaths come out as shudders. He doesn't know exactly whose emotions he's overwhelmed by, but he has the feeling it doesn't quite matter, both of them dealing with similar sensations of intense obsession mellowed by love for each other.

Will realizes he's crying when Hannibal's thumb wipes away a stray tear. He pulls back with a sigh to see Hannibal's eyes similarly gleaming with unshed tears. "We're hopeless, huh? I can't survive without you, and the thought of trying *hurts.* "

Hannibal nods in agreement, lips parting to speak but nothing comes out.

Will knows what's happening immediately. "Are you overwhelmed, baby? It's okay, me too, me too. You don't need to talk. Let me wash this stuff out then you can dress me up all you like. How's that sound?"

Hannibal just nods again, this time not trying to speak. Will understands, hell, he spent half his childhood nonverbal. Sometimes the words just don't come out. Will knows what Hannibal wants to say, wants to hold him close and whisper sweet nothings and 'I love you's and babble pet names in every language he knows.

Will dips his head under the water, rising back up when—unlike when he rinsed the shampoo out—Hannibal's fingers don't join his in scrubbing the conditioner out of his hair.

Will pouts at him, not genuinely upset but wanting to show Hannibal what he wants. "C'mon, I like your hands in my hair. Touch me?"

Hannibal grins, small and genuine, his eyes twinkling with happiness. His hands guide Will back under, long fingers weaving through his hair and scrubbing the conditioner out as he works the last remaining tangles loose.

Eventually, the water cools too much and Will stands up, Hannibal's forearm clasped in his hand to steady him. A fluffy, warm towel is wrapped around his shoulders as he steps onto the bath mat, feet leaving red prints when he steps off.

“Really, Hannibal? It looks like bloodstains when it gets wet?” This is even worse than the cannibal puns.

Hannibal just grins at him, shrugging in a way that Will guesses means ‘I’ll tell you later’. Hannibal helps pat him down before leading him back into the bedroom, towel still draped across his shoulders like a cloak.

Hannibal sits him down on the chaise at the foot of the bed, leaving for a moment to disappear into the closet before returning with a black garment bag. He drapes it over the bed beside Will and pulls him to his feet.

Hannibal unzips the bag, revealing a handsome, sleek navy blue suit with a darker damask pattern on the pants, jacket, and vest. He has paired it with a black dress shirt. A pocket on the garment bag is quickly unzipped to reveal a box of cufflinks, gold roses with a blue gem in the center. They’re gorgeous, and Will tells Hannibal as much.

Hannibal kneels to help him put on a pair of dark blue briefs and black socks, standing slowly for better leverage to slide each of his arms into the dress shirt. He lovingly buttons the shirt from the top down, skipping the topmost button for the moment. He slips into a kneel again as he buttons the last button. He pauses, looking up at Will as he leans in to place a kiss on his belly button through his shirt.

Will smiles at him with his eyes, hand carding through his slightly damp hair before Hannibal pulls away to grab the trousers. Crisp, freshly-ironed dress pants are held up for him and Will grips Hannibal’s shoulder for balance as he steps into them. Hannibal’s hands tickle his thighs as they slip into his pants to smooth his shirt down. Will can’t help but shudder at the touch, so intimate and reverent.

Hannibal buttons Will’s pants then slides a black leather belt through the belt loops. He stands again, kissing Will under each eye as he guides his arms one at a time through the arms of his vest. It gets buttoned up carefully, the top corners of the fabric brushing his sternum.

Hannibal pauses, stepping back to consider him for a moment. His hands brush over Will's front, so gently the touch is barely felt, his deft fingers popping the second button from its buttonhole. "Jacket or no jacket? I'm leaning toward no jacket, it makes you look quite dangerously handsome."

Will huffs a laugh. "Lemme see," he murmurs, tugging Hannibal along by the hand to the full-length mirror on the closet door.

He admires the figure in the mirror. Though it's not perfectly tailored for him, it's sized almost perfectly; the curve of the vest hugging his waist and accentuating the height of his torso, making him seem taller. The two open buttons at the collar do make him look dangerous, like a sexy Bond villain or a cocky young businessman.

"Oh hell, Hannibal! I look so different. I think if I let my hair dry so it's got some extra volume, it'll really sell the sex appeal. What do you think?"

Will sees Hannibal's pupils dilate in his reflection. At his back, he feels his broad chest stutter with a shocked inhale.

"I'll take that as a yes. Shoo, you've got dinner to start. Let me surprise you with the final product."

Hannibal's arms wrap around Will's waist tightly, his nose burying in his neck as he inhales deeply. "Let me set out your cologne for the evening, then I'll be out of your hair." He grunts as Will reaches back to jab him in the side at the pun. But he recovers quickly. "Feel free to use whatever products you please beyond that, what's mine if yours."

Will follows him back to the bathroom, socked feet carefully avoiding the few puddles he left behind as he watches Hannibal point out a new bottle of cologne. He waves goodbye at Hannibal as the other man informs him that, should he have time before Alana arrives, he can accompany him in the kitchen to help cook after he finishes.

Will digs through the products under the sink, doing a little victory dance when he finds some curling cream, a hairdryer, and a diffuser attachment. He spends the next ten minutes

carefully drying and styling his curls into a wild mane that brushes his shoulders. He spritzes a little of the cologne Hannibal set out for him on, finally slipping on the black leather wingtip Oxfords that sit below his garment bag.

He meanders down the stairs, brushing his fingers across the walls and whatever vase or artwork he comes across. Finally, he finds himself back in the kitchen, Hannibal managing the progress of a broth in a large saucepan. He glances at the clock: 45 minutes until Alana arrives.

“Would you like to–” Hannibal cuts himself off, glancing up at Will before returning to the task at hand. He does a double-take as he freezes in the middle of reaching to flip a large scallop in a frying pan beside the saucepan. “Will,” he sighs, “You look marvelous, absolutely appetizing.”

Will rolls his eyes at that, trying and failing to smother a grin. “If you tell me what to do, I can take over long enough for you to fix your hair.”

Hannibal’s brows furrow for a moment before he realizes, one hand reaching up to pinch a lock of oddly dried hair. “That would be wonderful, yes. The scallops are nearly done, in a minute set them aside here and add the spinach. Let that cook until it just starts to wilt, then season and do another handful or so until it’s all gone. I should be back by then, so don’t worry about anything else. Thank you, darling.”

Will washes his hands, peering over at the pan to keep an eye on the scallops until he can scoop them onto a nearby empty plate. He closes his eyes as he adds the first handful of spinach, enjoying the sounds of the kitchen surrounding him.

He’s just finishing the last batch of spinach as Hannibal walks back in, hair freshly washed and dress shirt and vest replaced with a suit that matches Will’s own, the colors inverted so the pants, vest, and, Will assumes, though Hannibal isn’t wearing it at the moment, jacket are pure black while the dress shirt is a sleek navy blue with a damask pattern.

His hair isn’t gelled back, though it is combed to the side. He looks devastatingly handsome, and the knowledge that he belongs to Will sends a thrill down his spine.

Hannibal glances at his progress, humming affirmatively. “You’ve done a wonderful job, though I never doubted otherwise.” He glances at his watch. “It’s time to finish the soup. I’ll leave it on the stove to finish while we eat the first course, so if for any reason you need a reprieve from the conversation you may use this as an excuse.”

Will watches as he drains some herbs and a handful of fish bones from the broth in the saucepan, adding in the vegetables to soften in the last few minutes before Alana knocks on the door. Right as she does, Hannibal is adding chunks of fish. He washes his hands quickly to hurry to the door but Will beats him to it, slipping through the foyer to swing the door open.

Alana blinks up at him from the doorstep as Will leans against the doorframe. “Hello, Alana. Come in, the first course is nearly finished.”

She nods, sweeping past him. “You clean up nice,” she teases, trying to lighten the mood. Her deep red dress is speckled with geometric patterns that creep down to her wrists in long, flowy sleeves. She looks nice too, always does, but unlike before he doesn’t feel a need to build a connection between them.

Will blatantly avoids all attempts at making eye contact, choosing instead to face forward as he leads her to the kitchen. “Thanks. I don’t know what exactly Hannibal’s making, but it smells nice. Some sort of fish soup.”

He enters first, quickly settling back at Hannibal’s side as he finishes plating their first course. He grabs the nearest plate and the decanter filled with wine, taking them to the dining room as Hannibal murmurs thanks and follows closely behind. He can hear him welcoming Alana and thanking her for joining them, but he doesn’t pay much attention.

He sits the plate he’s holding at the head of the table for Hannibal, setting the decanter down to come back with wine glasses for all of them. Alana doesn’t object though Will has seen in a few of his memories that Hannibal makes her a ‘special beer’. She stands awkwardly at her seat for a moment before seating herself, so likely she isn’t certain if that kind of favoritism is something Hannibal will allow her so soon after their breakup, despite how peaceful it was overall.

Hannibal pulls Will's chair out for him as he's busy pouring everyone's wine. He nods in thanks, brushing his hand along his shoulders as he walks past to his seat on Hannibal's right.

As both of his guests watch his movements intently, Hannibal sits with a smile that is well-put on but doesn't reach his eyes until he glances in Will's direction. "I'd like to thank you both for joining me tonight. Tonight, we rebuild new friendships with old friends and officially welcome Will back home after his release from the BSHCI." He raises his glass of wine in celebration, Will and Alana mirroring his movements.

"Our first course this evening is seared scallops on a bed of spinach with a pomegranate glaze. Since Will was kind enough to provide the fish for our dinner tonight, I thought a seafood theme for our first course might be appropriate as well." Will watches as Hannibal primly slices a thin chunk off of a scallop and scoops some spinach into his fork before sliding the bite carefully between his teeth. He marvels at how dainty yet strong he can appear in one gesture.

Out of the corner of his eye, he can see Alana dig in and he hurries to start eating without being caught staring at Hannibal. He isn't sure of the exact moment tonight in which he will reveal his burgeoning relationship with Hannibal, but he knows it has to be tonight and, if his luck is good, it will come at the most shocking time for Alana.

The first course passes quickly and with idle chatter, Alana asks about his recent return to the field and Will tries his best to respond with answers longer than one syllable. Mostly, he's successful. When their plates are nearly cleared, Hannibal checks his watch and stands, explaining that he will finish the last preparations for their main course before returning and that no, thank you, Alana, he doesn't need help and he'd hate to ask a guest to service themself at his dinner.

Will clears his throat. "I heard you guys were dating for a while?" He asks.

Alana's face goes red. "Oh, yeah, it wasn't anything serious. We broke up a few days ago."

"Oh. That sucks. You can… talk about anything with me, you know?" Will reaches across the table to place his hand on top of hers sympathetically.

She flips her hand over to clasp his, her other hand coming up to pat his hand affectionately. “Thanks. I guess the thing that surprised me the most was how suddenly it happened. I mean, we got together because we both needed the comfort after your… but I didn’t expect us to end when you were released. I’m glad you’re out though, I can’t believe I let some serial killer trick me into thinking you could do something like *that* , even if you weren’t aware of your actions!” She flops down onto the table. “I feel so foolish.”

Will can feel her hurt at being betrayed by herself like that, how desperately she wishes she hadn’t let her emotions overwhelm the logical part of her that believed—believes, once more—he’s too good to ever do that.

“I don’t know if I can forgive you, not right away, but I am willing to try. You’re still my friend Alana; you treated me better than most would in your situation. I appreciate that you didn’t try to send me to jail,” he jokes, wryly, pleased when she huffs out a laugh despite herself.

“I should’ve done more. I’ll do more now, I’ll listen better.” He doesn’t deny that she could’ve done more, they both know he’d be lying.

Hannibal comes in then, peering into the dining room with a quirked eyebrow. Will just shrugs so he speaks. “Will, could you assist me in preparations?”

“Yeah, coming.” He pats Alana’s hand one more time before standing, following Hannibal where he’s disappeared back into the kitchen.

He’s blending the broth with some sort of mixture, an aioli by the smell of it. In three bowls, the fish has been divided up, flaky and ready to have broth ladled on top. Will wraps an arm around him, kissing his cheekbone. “It smells delicious, baby. Can’t wait to try it.”

“Thank you. What were you two discussing?” Hannibal speaks softly so their voices don’t carry over the sounds of the blender whirring.

“Your breakup, her guilt. She wants to make it up to me for not believing me.”

“Yes, Alana is burdened with her need for everything to work as she expects it to; good must have evil, friends must play nice together. When it doesn’t go her way, she often feels unmoored, a boat drifting off to sea. Will you tell her about us? You made no hint of it earlier.”

“I’m just waiting for the right moment,” Will sidesteps giving him a direct answer. It’ll be more fun to see Hannibal’s genuine reaction to his meddling.

Hannibal switches the blender off, dipping a tasting spoon in the broth and lifting it to Will’s lips in offering. Will licks his lips and hums as he samples it, enjoying the way the hand holding the spoon quivers minutely.

“C’mon, we shouldn’t leave our guest waiting,” Will chirps, digging around in the right drawer for a ladle. He finds it and scoops a good portion of the broth into each bowl, stealing a sip after he’s finished.

Will carries one bowl and a plate full of sliced crispy bread over to the table, once again serving Hannibal alone. He settles back in his seat as Hannibal does the same.

“Bourride, a French fish stew. It is a Provençal version of the more famous bouillabaisse, a workingman’s take on a French classic. In the past, working men would go fishing in the morning and bring back their catch, where their wives would make lunch of it. Though in France, it’s most often made from monkfish, sea bass is a common substitute, especially in America. Today, I used the fish Will caught for us.”

Holy hell, Hannibal! Could he get any more obvious? Will thinks he might’ve preferred a torrent of cannibal puns to blatantly being compared to old French husbands. Though, Hannibal does fit a lot of traditional gender roles regarding heterosexual couples. It’s reassuring that a man such as Hannibal would feel no ties to gender roles like that.

Will can imagine growing relaxed from the presentation he’s created for himself, such a stereotypically masculine man. He does genuinely enjoy fishing and playing with his dogs, but with Hannibal, he knows he’d be accepted if he ever decided to experiment with gender nonconformity, or even just frequent self-care in the form of a bubble bath or a manicure.

Despite Will's intense rumination, Alana doesn't seem to notice his silence, instead enthusiastically complimenting Hannibal's cooking. Will lets himself set aside that train of thought for later so he can dig into the stew.

"Let me guess, the wine comes from the same region as the recipe," Will drawls.

Hannibal nods, sending Will a pleased glance. "While it's astounding how predictable I've seemed to become, yes. A Provençal wine for a Provençal meal. I assume it is to your liking?"

"There's no need to dig for compliments, Doctor. I could never get tired of your cooking." Under the table, Will's left hand squeezes Hannibal's knee.

"I wouldn't want to assume," Hannibal placates falsely, the both of them enjoying their little back and forth all too much as Alana is forced to catch up.

"It's nice to see you two getting along again; for a moment it seemed like your falling out would've lasted. I do have to question whether it's appropriate for you to invite a patient for dinner like this, Hannibal, if only to maintain appearances."

Maintaining appearances? Will struggles not to scoff. "Hannibal isn't my psychiatrist, nor was he in any official capacity before my incarceration."

Hannibal sits up straighter in his chair. "Yes, I appreciate your concern, but Will and I never looked at our relationship through the lens of doctor and patient."

Alana's spoon clinks softly as she sets it down, folding her hands under her head. "It's just hard to know where you are with each other. One minute you're coworkers, the next Will acts like you're his worst enemy, then all of a sudden you're playing buddy-buddy again!"

Will stands, stepping to lean over Hannibal in his seat. One arm wraps around his shoulders possessively and he leans in to brush their cheeks together. His other hand picks up Hannibal's now-abandoned bowl, stacking it under his own. "We know where we are with each other. Shouldn't that be enough?" With that, he takes their dishes to the kitchen, feeling two sets of eyes following his path through the dining room before he disappears behind the door.

He sets the bowls in the sink then creeps back to the door, cracking it open just enough to hear their conversation. He wanted to create a certain effect with his confident departure but he's also curious to see how Hannibal will handle Alana's reaction without him and he isn't certain he trusts Hannibal to reliably convey the scene to him later.

"Hannibal?" Alana bites out. "Are you two…" She trails off, like the thought of them having anything outside of a friendly relationship causes her physical pain.

"Are we what, Alana? Will and I are many things to each other."

" *Fucking* ?" She finally gets out.

"I wouldn't phrase it so crudely, but that is one aspect of our burgeoning relationship. I believe I've harbored romantic feelings for Will for a while now, though I was careful not to act on them until now. If I were to give us a label, I suppose Will would be my partner or boyfriend."

Will wishes he could see Alana's face right now. He wonders whether it's her disappointed scowl or her shocked grimace.

"And what about when he accused you of-of being the Chesapeake Ripper? Hannibal, how does anyone recover from that so quickly? It just doesn't seem… thought out."

"That was early on in his incarceration, and Will has retracted his statement and apologized repeatedly. He was sick, Alana, I cannot blame him for being a little scrambled. He's working to catch the real Ripper now," Hannibal soothes and Will can hear shuffling of fabric against

fabric. He imagines Hannibal leaning forward to clasp Alana's hands in his, intentionally replicating Will's own attempts at placating Alana before dinner.

"I just don't know if I can approve of this, it's all so sudden and Will's still recuperating from his imprisonment at the BSHCI. How do you know this isn't a clutch for balance? He's clung to romantic relationships before in an attempt to steady himself." Alana's words sting and Will wants to hurl Hannibal's fancy china at her head but he restrains himself.

"Will is stronger than he was. He's struggling a bit as a result of the past few months, yes, but not to the extent that you're assuming. He needs friends and he wants to be able to rebuild his friendship with you, so don't isolate him from yourself by villainizing a relationship he instigated. He's a smart man, if he decides that he's becoming too dependent on me, or I on him, he will try to work it out."

Alana sniffles and silence fills the room for a moment. "Yeah, maybe. I-I can wait, watch him and see if he's struggling before I jump to conclusions. I trust you not to take advantage of him."

Will quietly sneaks into the kitchen again, turning the sink off and slipping oven mitts on to find their dessert. It's not on but he doesn't want to risk the glassware still being hot, so he carefully slides it out of the oven and sets it on the stove.

Hannibal enters as he's slipping the mitts off. "Sticky buns with pecans. I thought the sweetness would be welcome after the savory dishes that precede it." Hannibal takes his place, gently scooting him to the side with a nudge against his hip with his own. He gracefully flips the glass tray over onto a sheet pan and taps the top to free the dessert.

They work quietly side by side to plate three of the sticky buns and sprinkle extra candied pecans on top.

"You know this isn't a clutch for balance, yeah?" Will asks softly.

Hannibal looks up at him, surprised. "Of course. I know why you kissed Alana all those months ago, and you had the sense to know something was wrong. Even if I hid it from you,

you knew it was a mistake right away. I meant what I said, Will. You're too smart to fall for that. Now or then."

Will pointedly avoids eye contact, furrowing his brow as he stares at the plate of sticky buns in his hands. "Good. Good. I knew that, just… hearing her suggest it made me feel *wrong* , I needed to hear it from you."

"And now you have. Chin up, darling. We have nothing to worry about. We're problem-free, remember?" Hannibal tilts his chin up so Will is forced to stare at him rather than the dessert, though not high enough that he has to worry about eye contact.

Will feels the corners of his lips twitch into a grin and he tries to smother it, to no avail. "Problem-free. Perfectly sane."

Hannibal bobs his head in an exaggerated nod so Will sees it from the corner of his eyes. "Let's not leave Alana stewing, shall we?" He hooks their elbows together and carefully picks up a plate of sticky buns in each hand.

As they walk by, Will drops off the plate he's carrying in front of Alana and she smiles up at him appreciatively. From then on, dessert goes smoothly, idle but enjoyable chatter filling the space between them.

It was nice, Will realizes as he walks Alana to the door. He tells her as much, thanking her for coming.

"It's no problem, Will. You're planning on picking up more cases for Jack, yes? Maybe I'll see you there at a crime scene or two," she says.

Will smirks. "Hoping for more killers, hm? Don't tell Jack, he might set you in his crosshairs next. I can see the headlines now: 'Crazed Killer Working For FBI Or Framed Consultant, Second In A Pattern?' Freddie Lounds would use it to call me insane again, suggest I framed you for crimes I found a way to pass the blame off on."

Alana grimaces and Will is reminded that she's less appreciative of his dark humor than Zeller or Price. If Bev were here, though…

"Ah, goodnight, Alana. Thank you again for stopping by. If it makes you feel any better, I'm only gonna hang around long enough to get the dishes done. I've still got the dogs to take care of."

She nods appreciatively, though she tries to play it off. "It's no big deal, Will. I was just startled, is all. I care about your happiness, first and foremost. Say hi to the dogs for me, will you? Applesauce misses them."

"Applesauce?"

"I'm picking up your bad habits. I adopted her when I was watching your dogs. The reminder that they weren't mine made me feel lonely even though I didn't know when you'd be taking them back so… Applesauce."

"Dog collecting. Generally not the worst habit someone could pick up."

Alana chuckles, her breath clouding visibly in the cold night air. She wraps her jacket tighter around her shoulders, waving goodbye to Will and Hannibal, who stands silently, peering over Will's shoulder.

"Fuck! It's cold, let's get inside," Will grunts, turning and shoving Hannibal back playfully as soon as Alana slips into her car.

"Perhaps a drink by the fire after we finish the dishes? Nothing too strong, I'd hate to keep you from your pack, but something to warm you before you leave."

"Sounds nice. Hot chocolate? With sprinkles and whipped cream?" Will bats his eyes at Hannibal, who grins at him.

“Sprinkles and whipped cream it is.”

Chapter End Notes

Will’s suit I found on my go-to suit-perusing website, where it goes for $400 without customizations, 500 with. The cufflinks that I found, on the other hand, are more than 10 times the cost of the suit. I think that Hannibal would go for quality over cost, if the suit is up to his standards, while he knows that Will would assume that the cufflinks would be cheaper because they’re smaller and he’s willing to splurge on small details that really round out the whole outfit, especially for Will.
P.S. the links for the suit, cufflinks, and shoes are embedded in the fic where they're first described if you missed them! I would've put them here but one of the URLs was so long it was obnoxious.
Have a lovely week!

Giving Me the Runaround

Chapter Summary

Will has an unexpected guest and finishes the last step of his part of the plan with Abigail. Hannibal is forced to consider his level of commitment to Will.

Chapter Notes

This week's chapter title is from OTGW ("This ol' frog's giving me the runaround!")
I didn't mean for this chapter to come more than a day late, but I got overwhelmed with homework and plans I had made a while ago that I forgot about. Also, I spent most of my usual writing time binge-reading The Queer Principles of Kit Webb, which was so much fun! Next week will be on time since I'll be prepared for the weekly amount of stuff due.
I edited this while watching the Polygon Pokerap video so hopefully, I didn't miss anything :/\

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Will gets home, with his borrowed suit stored carefully back in its garment bag, someone is waiting for him. No car is around, so they must've been dropped off by taxi. They're either quite broad or bundled in enough layers they'd survive a sudden onset of an ice age. Based on the relative shortness—the figure's head only brushes the bottom of the windowsill as they sit down on his porch chair—the latter seems most likely.

Approaching, he squints in the low light to see the woman from Hannibal's office—Margot Verger, if the dozens of newspaper articles he found on her after a quick googling are true. She sits daintily, the top and most visible layers of her outfit being a fur coat over a full-length black trench coat buttoned up to her chin. Almost awkwardly, she raises a single hand in a tentative wave.

"It's not polite to show up uninvited. Leads to this exact situation," he gripes.

“Which one? The one where I wait two hours in the snow for you or the one where you kick me out without hearing what I have to say?” Her voice is high, artificially so, like she’s used to doing a voice for someone. Will’s heard the rumors that follow her family like a shroud; he doesn’t want to think deeper on why she might do so.

“The first one. Despite what Freddie Lounds wants everyone to think, I’m not awful enough to do something like kick you out without inviting you in for a hot drink before your cab arrives. Why are you here, Margot?” He unlocks the door, allowing the dogs to spill out like the world’s most fuzzy and excitable tsunami.

She follows him through the door. Will would’ve expected that she would hesitate even a moment considering his reputation but she doesn’t. Like she’s got something infinitely worse than anything he could ever do to her chasing her in. More and more he wishes that he had never run into her that evening, what with the trouble she’s bound to get him into.

Will tries to avoid eye contact and for the most part, Margot seems to accept that. When he’s puttering around in the kitchen trying to make them coffee he makes the mistake of looking up when asking how she takes it.

He passively notes that he’s standing at attention, his eyes taking in all possible escape routes despite the knowledge that this is familiar territory; it should be safe, but right now he can’t even find comfort in the familiar. Everything he was feeling before, the annoyance, confusion, curiosity, are all muted now, merely whispers in comparison to how strongly he usually feels.

She’s not numb, he knows, just not particularly keen on feeling large emotions, especially when expressing them could be the straw that breaks the camel’s back for her.

Will blinks and he’s back in his own head. “Do you like milk and sugar? It’s pretty bad on its own so…”

“Just milk, thank you. I looked you up; for a while you were Doctor Lecter’s patient.”

Will raises an eyebrow at her as he sets two mugs by the coffee machine, nearly done brewing half a carafe now. “Only unofficially. We were more friends than anything.”

She hums. “Do you know about his more… unorthodox methods of treatment?”

“I think I’m more intimately aware of them than most.”

“I tried to kill my brother, that’s what led me to his office. Do you know what he said to me?”

Will can vaguely recall Hannibal hovering over him as he slouches in his chair, checking his pupils and muttering about Becoming and defining himself through action rather than confining himself to watching through someone else’s eyes. “Something along the lines of ‘give it another go’?”

Margot nods, eyes darting over to the counter as the coffee machine beeps incessantly to tell them the coffee’s finished.

“I assume your brother deserves it.”

“More than you know,” she mumbles, eyes going unfocused as she gets lost in her thoughts.

“Aren’t you the heir to the Verger meat-packing industry? Can’t you just… tell him to get lost and cut ties? Send him to some remote corner of the earth so he can torment the locals instead of Baltimore’s finest?”

She smiles bitterly. “I’m not. The heir, I mean. It was bad enough that I was a girl, but when my father found out about my proclivities, he kicked me out of his Will and added a clause saying that if there is no male heir to pass the fortune onto, it all goes to the Southern Baptist Convention.”

It's the most she's said to him at once, and every word fills him with dread. It reminds him of his youth, the northernmost states he frequented more familiar with the lingo and therefore more ready to weaponize them against the kids they viewed as 'other,' or otherwise gawk at the few out queer kids like they're the circus. The South was no better, their vitriol less focused but just as soul-crushing.

He swallows, time dulling the pain of old wounds. "You tried to kill your brother anyway; why risk it?"

Margot considers the question, watching the milk slowly blend into her coffee, the steam warming her nose as she holds the mug up to her face. "At some point along the way, I stopped caring. For a moment, the idea of being free from him overwhelmed my senses and I was willing to give it all up. Now, I see the fault in my logic, but…"

"A door's been opened that cannot be closed any longer," he finishes for her. "For the longest time, I was afraid that I'd get washed away if I gave into the violence. All I felt was good, I felt more like myself than I'd ever been before. Thanks to Hannibal and his meddling. I imagine he's told you that the best way to keep what is rightfully yours close while still being able to rid yourself of Mason is to have a son of your own."

She nods, taking a sip of her coffee and scrunching her nose minutely at the taste. Will silently pushes the carton of milk closer. "Did you miss the part where I said I was a lesbian?"

Will chuckles. "No, no. I mean, is adoption on the table? I assume it would take too long for artificial insemination and the like, enough time for your brother to catch wind of your plan and put a stop to it. The best option might be the good old-fashioned method, followed by fleeing the country for a while. We could make it look like you died."

"And is that your way of offering to help?"

"I hadn't meant it like that, but I suppose I know all the secrets on how to get away with murder, or at least making it look like someone was murdered."

“No, the sex part.”

“I know I was intentionally vague but I *am* dating Hannibal.”

Her eyes widen minutely. “Even better, then. You won’t get unnecessarily attached.”

“I’m not a dog, you know,” Will grumbles. He hops onto the counter, chugging his coffee and pouring himself another, downing that with similar speed. Margot leans against the counter, finally relaxing a bit. “Besides,” he continues, “I never intended to pass on my genes. Everything about me screams bad sire, doesn’t it?”

“I didn’t mean to imply that you are. From my perspective, you’re not a half-bad choice, assuming the kid even inherits much from you in the first place. Besides, I don’t think I’m in a position to play pick and choose over inheritable traits. If it sways your decision, I can pay you once this is all over.”

“I don’t want your money, Margot.” He considers the offer for a moment. “I want to help you kill your brother when the time comes. Even tangentially, if you want to do the heavy-lifting.”

Margot coolly raises an eyebrow. “I could use an ally, I suppose. You have a deal, Mr. Graham.”

“It’s been a pleasure working with you, Ms. Verger,” he teases, sticking his hand out for her to shake. He feels silly, treating this like a business transaction, but it’s the only thing keeping him from kicking her out and disappearing into the forest to live out the rest of his days as a hermit, the only company he’d keep being that of his dogs. And Hannibal, he finds the man worming his way into this world of make-believe.

“Do you want to get it over with now or would you rather we hold off ‘til you’re ready?”

Margot grimaces and Will struggles not to laugh. “I don’t think I’ll ever be ready. Besides, I’d rather not give Mason the chance to realize I’m planning something; it goes against the

whole ‘faking my own death’ thing.”

Will nods. “I think we’re both gonna need some alcohol. Whiskey?”

~

Will usually isn’t impulsive, so his arrangement with Margot makes him feel odd. He knows he’ll tell Hannibal, she’s his patient and he’s Will’s partner, after all. It would be distasteful to keep it a secret. He won’t give away any details besides the bare minimum, though, he’d hate to put another target on her back by making Hannibal jealous.

He tells Margot as such before he escorts her to her cab, paid for by himself and planning to drop her off somewhere in the middle of Baltimore, where she’ll take a second—and then third—cab to head home. She seems amicable, if anything, perhaps hoping that Hannibal will make himself into a formidable ally against Mason.

Sometime within the next few days, Margot will find the opportunity to contact him tracelessly and Will will meet her. From there, they’ll set up her crime scene. He’ll need some of Hannibal’s supplies so he needs to convince him to help sooner rather than later.

That will come later, but for now, Will settles into bed. Tonight, he’s decided that he’ll try and reach out to Hannibal in his mind palace. It helps that it seems like whatever part of Hannibal is fueling the fake Will seems to be unconscious, the conversation flowing too much like their real ones to be intentionally one-sided.

He knows Hannibal tends to stay up later, a seemingly inconsequential piece of information that Matthew Brown had provided before his death now allowing Will to wait in the chapel for Hannibal to appear. Though Will has, on occasion, appeared elsewhere, it took conscious action, so he hopes that when Hannibal visits in his sleep he’ll start here.

It only takes a few minutes of waiting, the hour already so late, before Hannibal arrives. He lights a candle or two then heads through the same door as before.

Will trails after him carefully, making sure not to make any noise. He feels silly avoiding creaky floorboards in someone's mental recreation of a building he's never actually stepped foot in, but everything about Hannibal is so odd that it's easy to overcome.

Instead of stopping in his office, Hannibal heads straight to Will's house. Will waits a moment, counting the seconds in his head before he risks cracking the door open, but he finds that Hannibal is moving to the back of the house, slipping through a closet door and assumedly into another area.

Will sighs as he slips through the door. It feels odd, being in his house without his dogs, though he knows they appear as soon as a memory starts. The discomfort pushes him forward just a bit faster than his normal walking pace, though he hesitates at the door.

He peers through the sliver of a gap he's opened the door to. Hannibal, once again, seems content to relive memories of the two of them that just happened, their domestic moment in Hannibal's bedroom before Hannibal returns to the kitchen just beginning. If Will were perhaps saner, he'd worry about Hannibal's need to be around him so constantly that he spends his nights watching their last meetings, but Will isn't, and he's done that exact thing many nights before. Instead, it makes him feel warm, assured that he's burrowed himself so deeply into Hannibal that he has to get a fix within hours of Will leaving his house.

Will once again finds himself watching Hannibal as he watches the memory of Hannibal's deft fingers dressing him worshipfully; it's beautiful. Like in the memory, Will can hardly pull his eyes from the sight of Memory Hannibal kneeling at his feet, but he does so to catch a glimpse of the way the real Hannibal circles the pair of them, studying each movement with awe. His fingers twitch and Will can imagine him sitting cross-legged as he draws the scene.

Eventually, Memory Hannibal makes his way toward the door and Will flattens himself against the wall next to it to hide from sight. The door clicks shut behind Memory Hannibal and he fizzles out of existence. Will pushes himself from the wall to watch as Hannibal gently cups Memory Will's cheek as he, too, fades away. Hannibal's arm drops to his side, his face hidden as his back faces Will.

Before Hannibal can summon another memory, Will steps into the room silently, closing the door behind him gently. As he steps in, the suit from earlier materializes on top of him, and only now Will truly appreciates the fact that Hannibal is similarly dressed up in his attire from dinner.

“So needy for me that you just can’t seem to get away. Do you find yourself worrying about the consequences?” Will enjoys the way Hannibal spins around suddenly to face him, eyes widened in surprise, though his features are overtaken by a pleased grin.

“Rarely do I find myself worrying, and never in regards to my feelings for you. Worry is for those riddled with uncertainty, and I am certain of the trust I have placed in you. And in my numerous bank accounts and safehouses held under an alias, should the need arise. Though, less and less, I find myself caring for my security first and foremost.”

“You’re mine and I’m yours, and there’s nothing we can do about it?”

Hannibal’s lips twitch into a barely-there grin. “Precisely.”

“What makes me different from any of your other patients like Margot Verger or Randall Tier?” Will *is* a little disturbed by the realization that manipulating his patients into murder seems par for the course for Hannibal.

“Everything. You’re the first to truly see me, understand me, and appreciate all that I am. My patients come to me so they can be seen; there is no expectation, desire, nor capability to have any form of reciprocation on either side. I can change them, but none leave more than a passing effect on myself.”

“You think I have the potential to inspire change in you? Besides what’s already happened?”

Hannibal flops onto the bed, somehow gracefully. Will leans over his sitting form. He watches as Hannibal licks his lips before speaking. “You seem to inspire… constant change in me, or at least a desire to adapt for you. To you. I would become whatever you asked of me. I find myself struggling to feel any sorrow for my loss of individuality.”

“We have the unique potential to become one.”

Hannibal's eyes widen as his words sink in. "Yes," he whispers, reaching up to cup Will's face.

Will sighs, leaning farther into Hannibal's warmth. "Maybe one day, we will never have to part. Not during the day, not in sleep. Completely conjoined. Don't you want that?"

Hannibal's lip twitches at Will's sickly sweet lilting tone. "Of course. If I had the option, I'd stay by your side forever."

"You would not ask such loyalty of myself in return?"

"I don't feel the need to. I know you are mine and if ever you turned your back on our companionship I'd find you, wherever you went. I'd prove to you the extent of my devotion, and you'd either welcome me back or we would kill each other." Hannibal's long fingers wrap around Will's neck loosely like a collar—like a promise.

"Will, I have come to the devastating realization that I like being with you infinitely better than I could ever enjoy my solitude, or if I kept the company of any other person on earth. You make me happy, and I'd do anything to make you happy."

Will leans in just enough that his lips brush Hannibal's. "And if I asked for you to leave me alone?"

Hurt flashes in Hannibal's eyes, but unlike in their normal conversations, he makes no effort to disguise it. "I would, for as long as possible. I'd keep myself from you, waiting where I know you could find me, waiting for the day you free me from my self-imposed exile."

He means it, as painful as it is to even utter the words. If Will decided that morning that he wanted Hannibal to stay far from him, he would vanish somewhere where only Will could find him. Will would hold the sole key to Hannibal's happiness, given freely by the man himself.

He sniffles, overwhelmed by the bone-deep sadness that floods from Hannibal into him. “I’d never ask you to,” he reassures, blinking tears from his lashes.

“Even so, I would.”

They stand there for a while, basking in the comfort the other provides. Will wonders what Hannibal assumes is happening here, if his subconscious normally would instigate deep conversations, only to comfort him when the emotions they summon overwhelm him. He doesn’t care much if this is the first time Hannibal has felt reassurance here; he promises himself that it won’t be the last.

Will forces himself to wake up so that he can vanish like the Fake Will from the conversation he spied on. Blinking the blurriness of sleep from his eyes, Will sends a text to Hannibal asking if he’d be up to going on a double date with him to meet Bev’s partner, not expecting a response immediately, and glad when one doesn’t come. He likes the assurance that, for the moment, Hannibal will be too preoccupied to stumble across his plans.

He sends an email to Abigail’s secret email from an account he makes on the spot, wanting an extra level of secrecy to ensure that Hannibal can’t find it. *It’s time,* it reads, *come to my house and I’ll bring you the rest of the way.*

~

When he hears an engine rumbling and gravel crunch under tires, he peers out the window through the blinds to double-check that it’s Abigail’s car. The familiar red peers back at him, headlights dimmed.

While waiting for Abigail to arrive, he had discovered the route to the cabin where Miriam is hidden. He knows the exact route they need to take to avoid the few cameras they’ll pass by, and the exact route he’ll take to help them sneak out of the country.

He has connections, and a decent amount of money saved up for important purchases, so it was simple to get a couple of fake passports for Abigail and Miriam. Hannah and Annabel Smith will board a plane in West Virginia and land in Arizona. From there, Abigail will

dispose of those identities and then they'll drive up to Nebraska. Alice Parker and Mabel Harris will fly to France. From there, Abigail will take the reins and the two of them will decide where to go without Will.

He lets the dogs out before he leaves. Will is pleased when Abigail instantly hops out of the car as his pack swarms outside. Half of his pack hurry to her side when she emerges and she crouches down to pat their eager heads, soft laughter twinkling through the air.

"No one ever told me about your dogs," she beams at him, "I would've loved to meet them earlier."

"Yeah, well, most people don't react as well when they find out, and despite Hannibal's meddling, I feared getting too involved in your life. That obviously didn't go too well, sorry."

Abigail stands, tucking her hands under her armpits. "I won't say you're completely free of fault, but I think we can agree that Hannibal is primarily to blame for everything that's gone down in my life recently. We could spend ages debating how much blame falls on all of us, but we have an escape plan to execute."

Will nods, wrangling the dogs into the house and making sure the heater was running for them before joining Abigail in her car.

Her face is relaxed but her shoulders are tense, and Will instantly remembers the last time the two of them were in a car alone together and the devastation that followed. He sighs deeply. "I hope that once you get where you want, you can figure yourself out without a bunch of jackasses trying to pull you in whatever direction they think is best for you."

Abigail glances at him, eyes darting back to the road before she smiles softly. "Yeah, three shitty father figures in a row, maybe I should try 'cool older friend' or 'weirdly young legal guardian that I still live with' for a bit."

Will exaggeratedly winces, hand clutching above his heart. "Ouch, go easy on me, will you? But seriously, stay safe. Head off on this exit, yeah here."

They drive mostly in silence for a while, the only breaks in the silence coming from Will as he guides Abigail to the cabin. Eventually, with snow flitting around them, the car pulls up to the decrepit old building.

Will pulls out two pairs of leather gloves and helps Abigail tuck her hair into a hat to keep from leaving trace DNA. He makes sure his own hat is on snug, tugging it over his sticky-outy ears to keep them from the chill. The two of them creep around the building, checking for traps or cameras laid by Hannibal. When Will is certain they're in the clear, he has Abigail linger behind as he swings the door open.

"Miriam Lass?" He calls out into the dark, making his voice more gravelly in case there are recording devices that he missed from his loop around the perimeter.

There's no response, but he expected that. He can't imagine that Hannibal would have left her in the cabin without any sort of restraints for however long it takes for Zeller and Price to locate her. He steps in further, waving Abigail in behind him.

Bookshelves and random assortments of medical tools line the walls and make the already grim front room even eerier. It's such a tongue-in-cheek facsimile of the stereotypical serial killing psychopath's lair that Will can't help but grin at Hannibal's terrible jokes. Abigail gives him a curious look and he shrugs, unsure of how to explain how well he knows Hannibal—and how much that pleases him—to someone who spends every moment distantly fearful of that same man making the snap decision to kill her.

In the only other room, two cisterns stick out of the ground forebodingly. Will knows immediately that Miriam must be in one of them.

He gestures to the closest one, eyebrows raised, silently asking Abigail if she wants to open it while he does the same to the second, which he's more confident Hannibal has hidden Miriam in. She nods and carefully approaches it.

Will hefts the wooden lid up, peering down in the low light to see if there's any movement in the bottom. Unsurprisingly, it's too dark, so he pulls out a flashlight he'd tucked into his pocket before leaving.

A pale figure laid gently on the floor and clad in a hospital gown, an IV nestled into the crook of her elbow. Miriam's pale hair is darker than in her photos, and if she were awake he imagines she'd be more sensitive to light. She hasn't been conscious much in the past two years, and even less of that time has been spent in the sun.

"She's here," Will beckons Abigail over. "I'll climb in and lift her up. Do you think you could pull her out so I can climb up on my own?"

Abigail hums, head tilting as she considers. "She's a couple of inches shorter than me, I think, and I played tennis for a few semesters in high school. I think I can manage, but I'll let you know if I need some help."

Will lowers himself down gently, making sure not to land on Miriam's unconscious form. Before anything else, he makes sure to press her fingerprints solidly onto the cement of the floor. He gently slides the IV from her elbow and lifts her, one hand on her upper back and the other holding her hip from slipping as he essentially hefts her up to sit on his shoulders.

Abigail lays on her stomach, peering over the lip of the cistern at the pair of them. The flashlight is tightly gripped between her teeth as she angles it down to see better, reaching down to hook her hands under Miriam's armpits.

When her grip is solid, Will hefts Miriam up further, holding her by the lower thighs so she's mostly upright as Abigail wriggles backward. None of it is particularly smooth-going, and Will wonders how Hannibal manages to arrange elaborate tableaux without feeling like an inflatable balloon outside a car dealership fumbling about.

Eventually, Miriam is successfully carried to the car as Abigail awkwardly shuffles through the cabin and brushes off each of Will's protests that she wait for him to get back up to help her.

When she's gone, Will sighs and backs up the few steps to the wall behind him. He pushes forward, jumping as he reaches the opposite side of the cistern and scrambling awkwardly up the wall for a desperate moment before his fingers curl around the ledge and he manages to

heft himself up. The wall crumbles as his feet slip on the chipped concrete where he leverages himself up further.

He manages to claw his way up enough for him to sit on the ledge, flopping back as he huffs in exhaustion. Even if this had happened ten years ago before he had quit the police force, he doesn't think he'd be properly prepared for this, and the decade of teaching only made each second he spent grappling for the ledge that much more straining. His arms shake as he holds them in front of him and he almost regrets that his primary hobby is fishing rather than weightlifting.

Abigail peers in from the front room at him and he awkwardly wiggles his fingers in the world's most painful wave ever experienced. He groans, arms plopping back to his sides. "I should've just gone back home to get a ladder."

"That probably would've been best." Abigail's face appears above him and she sticks out a hand to help him up.

He takes the proffered hand, groaning as he stands shakily. He brushes the dust off of his back and knees as he grumbles, "If ever I see you face to face again, never mention this."

"Mention what?" She winks at him.

"Exactly."

He slips through the cabin back to the car, propping open the backseat door where Miriam is resting. He gently grips her head in one hand and several strands of hair in the other, tugging until the strands free themselves from her scalp. He checks to make sure that at least a few of them have the follicle attached before he readjusts her in the seat and buckles her in. He hooks the strands through a jagged protrusion on the side of the cistern.

Abigail walks through a hidden patch of dust left behind by the back door, intentionally pressing a prominent footprint into it at Will's guidance. She creeps through the door and around the cabin to the car just in case the footprints aren't covered by the snow by the time Jack arrives.

Will takes the wheel this time, Abigail eventually laying her head against the window as she rests until they arrive at the motel that they'll rent. She waits in the car to make sure Miriam doesn't wake up before Will can get them a key to a room he's paid for for the next two nights before they head to the airport alone.

Will hands Abigail an envelope filled with cash, some forged credit cards, and four separate identities for each woman. He takes Abigail's car with him when he leaves, abandoning it on a backstreet before calling a cab to drive him to Virginia, where he switches cabs one last time before arriving home as the sun rises.

Chapter End Notes

I absolutely despise how Margot's plan is handled in canon so. I changed it. The women in this show are treated terribly, and I want to fix that as well as I can.
Stay safe! See you next week :3

What A Pleasure It Would Be If You Let Me Take Your Heart

Chapter Summary

Will's officially back on the Ripper case and Hannibal begins to see his plans crumbling around him.

Chapter Notes

Shaking things up, this week's chapter is from the song Happy People by Four Eyes, it has a very strong second half of season 3 Hannibal vibe if he were a househusband instead of locked up in the BSHCI!
This chapter's a little on the shorter side than what I aim for, in part because I'm getting used to my new schedule and partly because it would've ended up super long if I hadn't ended it here
P.S., I forgot to mention last week but I'd like to thank Maidenhair_Tree, our lovely discussion encouraged me to step outside of my comfort zone and write Will and Abigail's plan into existence!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will wakes up to a sharp knock on the door. He cracks his eyes open with a groan, fumbling for his phone. Three missed calls from Jack alone, and one text from Bev letting him know that they're on the way to pick him up to a potential Ripper crime scene, of sorts.

He shuffles out of bed and changes into a clean-ish shirt and jeans. He navigates through the swarm of dogs barking at the door and lets them rush out to play in the snow and find whatever dying scrap of grass they've decided to pee on or harass Jack for treats he doesn't have.

Jack stands a few feet from the door, familiar now with Will's pack's enthusiasm when guests arrive. He's swaddled in a puffy jacket, thick and warm-looking and it makes Will regret not putting on another three layers before opening the door. At least he should've thought to grab socks, but he stands barefoot on the threshold.

“We traced some bacteria in the most recent Ripper kill, the one dropped right after your release when you hadn’t rejoined the case. Long story short, we’ve narrowed down the Ripper’s potential workspace to a small area in Virginia, just west of here. Grab your shoes and throw some more layers on, for god’s sake. I can’t have you freeze to death before we catch the Ripper.”

“Gee, thanks Jack,” Will snarks without any malice. “I’ll save any freezing for after the Ripper’s in jail.”

Despite his bitching, Will immediately shuffles back inside, burying his chilly toes in thick wool socks and his most weatherproof pair of boots and tossing two jackets and thick, insulated gloves and a matching hat on before calling the dogs back inside.

He hops in the backseat of Jack’s van, squishing in beside Bev, Zeller on her other side. Price lounges in the passenger seat, luxuriating in the legroom he’s stolen from Zeller, whose knees are practically pressed to his chest.

The three lab techs grumble out *‘good morning’* s and ‘ *close the door* ’s as he settles in. When everyone’s settled, the heat comes on full blast and for the first time in a couple of minutes, Will can feel the tip of his nose.

It’s a relatively short drive from Will’s house to their destination, the car mostly silent. There’s a grim look on everyone’s faces; no one wants to get their hopes up about finding evidence to convict the Ripper but they’re all still terrified they’ll find nothing.

The cabin looks the same as it did six hours ago; still decrepit, still abandoned. The snowfall stopped not soon after Will and Abigail left with Miriam, so the tire tracks are still faintly visible. It’s a popular model, so nothing will come of them, but the sight has Jack speeding up the last few steps to the door. He knocks, but no sounds come from within. He tries the doorknob, to no avail. Unsurprising, given how Will locked the deadbolt out of instinct before leaving.

With one last glance at his team, where Will nods supportively, Jack rears back and busts through the old wood of the door, shoulder first. It caved under the force and the five of them crowd through, everyone but Will ready to draw their weapons at a moment’s notice. Bev

places herself bodily in front of Will since he hadn't gotten replacements for the guns the FBI confiscated yet.

Jack leads the way, peering around the doorframe to survey the backroom before heading in. He circles the closed cisterns, pausing a moment as he notices the marks in the dust surrounding the edge of the farthest one. Fingers, like someone hauled themself out of it. Most of them are left by Will, but some are where he guesses Abigail scrambled to sit up after lifting Miriam out.

Will stays back as Jack hefts the lid of the cistern open with a groan. With a thunk, it hits the ground, and Jack peers into the abyss. "Alright, who's climbing in to check for DNA? *Someone* was here, but it looks like they left recently."

"Not it!" Price chirps gleefully as he bops his pointer finger onto his nose.

Bev jumps to do the same and Zeller groans as everyone turns to look at him. "Climb in the hole, Brian! Check for DNA, Brian! Get up close to the corpse covered in bees, Brian!" he grumbles to himself as he shuffles back toward the car.

He returns shortly, hefting a ladder over one shoulder. He gets to work climbing down as Beverly and Price start searching the rest of the cabin. Jack pulls Will aside.

"This has gotta be the Ripper slipping up, yeah? That's likely the spot where Isley was drowned."

Will shakes his head. "The Ripper doesn't make mistakes; he led you here."

"He doesn't want to get caught. He isn't self-destructive like that."

Will glances over Jack's shoulder toward the cistern. "He wanted you to catch someone, just like he wanted you to catch me. Something in that room will lead you toward Hannibal

Lecter, and you won't find anything worthwhile to detract from the seeming legitimacy of the evidence."

"So we might be forced to arrest another innocent man the Ripper frames? That or have the higher-ups breathing down our necks for an arrest."

Will shrugs, gesturing toward the cistern. Jack follows the gesture curiously. "Maybe his plans got messed up. Maybe whoever was in there escaped and he hasn't found out about that yet. Maybe something here is the key to catching the Ripper."

~

Will bustles into Hannibal's house, barely pausing to kick his shoes off like Hannibal likes. "Hannibal! Where are you?" he shouts toward the back of the house.

A neatly-combed head peeks out of the doorway to his study. "Will? What's wrong?" Hannibal shuffles closer and Will is comforted by the scent of graphite that washes over him when he settles within arm's reach. He looks oddly comfortable, in just a dress shirt and vest, his socked feet padding along on the floor as he purposefully makes his footsteps louder. He glances behind Will like he expects someone else to be there with him. Jack, maybe, ready to haul him out at a moment's notice for assistance at the new Ripper scene that he's likely to know would be discovered soon.

"Miriam is gone."

Hannibal freezes, face blank.

"Jack took me to the cabin you hid her in, but the cistern was empty, fingerprints left in the dust, and footprints leading around the house to recent tire marks. Did anyone know about the cabin?"

Hannibal's eyes twitch open wider, nearly gaping at Will with how comparatively expressive the gesture is. Despite this, he shakes his head slowly.

" *Hannibal* ," Will growls. "Don't lie to me."

Hannibal nods stiffly and brushes past him to shove his shoes on. He doesn't speak, only guiding Will with a twitch of the hand as he heads to the garage.

Hannibal has the gall to open Will's door for him, which earns him a snort. Will flops into the passenger seat, waiting for Hannibal to start the car. When he does, he flicks his opera music off and turns the heat on low. He knows Hannibal hates the cold and even if the chill isn't comfortable for him either, he's willing to suffer through it a little to be petty.

They sit in silence the entire drive. It doesn't take long for Will to pick up on the fact that they're heading to the cliff house, though he doesn't feel like sharing that he knows where they're going already yet.

The cliff house looms ominously above as they pull into the driveway, the dark gray clouds overhead creating looming shadows that stretch with greedy fingers out toward them.

"Is this what you were going to show me?"

"This was supposed to be a surprise for you," Hannibal rasps, eyes flicking toward Will only to dart away a few seconds later then repeat the motion like he can't keep himself from looking for too long though he knows the ceaseless watching is driving Will up the wall.

"The house?"

"What's inside, or should still be. Come, I need to see if she's left."

Will follows close behind as Hannibal leads him up the steps and into the house. The windows provide lots of light on a good day, but they also do little to keep the chill out. Silence fills the air.

"I called ahead but you didn't answer, are you alright?" Hannibal calls into the empty space. Abigail was right, Hannibal would call, as he often does when he cannot physically check in, and be thrown off by the fact that he received no response.

They wander throughout the house. Will plays along when Hannibal peers into Abigail's abandoned room, furrowing his brow at the decor obviously meant for a young woman.

"Hannibal, who are we looking for?"

Hannibal sighs, turning around but avoiding Will's gaze. "Abigail was supposed to be here. I kept her safe for you until you could reunite once more, but she's disappeared. Perhaps she merely went out for groceries and forgot to bring her phone."

Will knows it's a weak platitude. They both saw the abundance of fresh produce and healthy supply of processed junk food stored in the kitchen, and her phone hasn't been in sight the entire time.

"You… you lied. You let me think I had killed her, let me think *you* killed her. And when were you going to tell me? Before I made you promise, when were you going to tell me about her?" It's cathartic to release his remaining anger like this; he'd held it in for so long.

Hannibal scowls. "As soon as I knew it was safe for the three of us. Not a moment later, Will. I swear to you. I faked her death to satisfy Jack's search for justice and I couldn't tell you until I knew you wouldn't use her against me."

Will shoves Hannibal with as much force as he can muster, his anger only intensifying when Hannibal stumbles back at the force without complaint. "So you used her against me. You fed me lies about how she was our daughter, then you took her away from me and used her to send me to the one place I knew I couldn't come back from on my own! Why should I believe you've changed?"

Hannibal's eyes dart up to meet his gaze then, anger burning bright. "If nothing had changed then I would've followed through with it. I would've valued my own safety over her life, your connection to her, and did away with her the moment she uncovered Nicholas Boyle's body. Even then, I took into consideration your feelings, her potential.

"I would never have found the strength to keep you in my life. I would've cast you aside the moment the risk outweighed the benefits, but I *need* you alive, Will. I would lose myself if I lost you. I've accepted that; I've adapted to avoid that as best I could. I could not undo the mistakes I made in the past, but I could do my best to limit the harm they did. I set you free, I took care of Abigail, I did my best to make sure you know how much I adore you."

Will draws back, stunned at the unadulterated hurt and anger in his voice, the tears glistening in his eyes unshed. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't've suggested… I know you've changed, Hannibal. I know it."

Hannibal slumps forward then, letting out all the tension in his body in one exhale as he drapes himself into Will's arms. "That was cruel," he agrees. "But I've been no better to you in the past. We must each learn to move past our mistakes without lashing out with weapons and hurtful words; I will do better for you from here on out. I'll find Abigail, make sure she's safe. Find Miriam, keep our future safe. I suspect that she helped Miriam escape, she always kept a watchful eye on me when I was treating her. I just don't know how she managed it."

Will tucks his chin over Hannibal's shoulder. "You don't need to do it alone. I'm with you now, 'til death do us fuckin' part, and even then I'll claw through heaven and hell to make sure I'm by your side."

"I am weak for you, my darling. And yet, I feel stronger than I've ever been, by your side." Hannibal pulls back to grin at Will.

Eventually, they head back to the car, having given up on searching the last few rooms of the house. It's hopeless, Will knows, since Abigail might, at this moment, be helping Miriam come to terms with their reality and explaining the escape plan.

He remembers then, that he's gotten roped into helping someone else flee the country with a passenger.

"Hannibal?" Will starts when they're pulling into the garage again. "I need to tell you something but you have to promise you'll listen before you freak out. Overall, it's an odd scenario and I regret doing it without letting you know first, but I'm an adult and I didn't do it to spite you or anything. I just wanted to help a friend."

"I hardly think there's anything you could say outside of egregious ad hominem attacks that could upset me, darling. I promise to let you explain the situation and we'll work this out together."

"That's very big of you, Doctor. Did you finally start listening to your therapist?"

"I think we both know that I never took much consideration into what Bedelia told me," Hannibal winks.

Will unbuckles so he can better turn in his seat to face Hannibal, knee pressed between him and the center console. "You *are* very good at not listening when you wanna be. I met your patient, Margot Verger, a few days ago. We didn't talk much, but later, after our dinner with Alana, she showed up at my house. We talked and I agreed to help her get away from her brother long enough for her to try earning a rightful claim to her inheritance. By that, I mean that I had sex with her with the intention of getting her pregnant so that she can flee the country until the baby is born and she kills her brother."

Hannibal blinks at Will for a moment. "You always manage to surprise me. When the baby is born do you plan on playing the role of father for your child?"

"It's not my child in any way besides genetically, don't worry. I can see you overthinking, and it's not like that. She offered to let me help her kill her brother, that's the extent to which my involvement with her extends. After that, well, you're the only egregiously rich person I have room for in my life. No love lost by cutting ties when our deal is done. You, on the other hand, I would lose myself to lose."

Hannibal's lips quirk up and he quickly smothers the action by pressing them into a thin line. "I know you do. As I am with you."

"Good. You don't need to be jealous or meddle, because nothing could take me from you. If I'm honest, I only primarily agreed for the chance to help her kill Mason Verger. Rumors make him out to be a repulsive man; I'd enjoy seeing a man like that get knocked off his pedestal. Or beat to a pulp."

"Would you feel comfortable giving in to your darker desires if it meant seeing someone you thought poorly of suffer?"

"It feels good to do bad things to bad people. On some level, we all enjoy it."

"Not everyone is willing to resort to murder."

"We're not everyone, hm?" As the center console digs into his ribs, Will distantly notes that he and Hannibal have slowly been closing the distance between them, their noses nearly brushing now.

"Every day, I'm grateful for that. Life would be dreadfully boring as just another layman, following the flow of society and never once enjoying the simple act of stirring up trouble."

"I think every once in a while, it might be alright to leave it well alone, but I can't help but feel the tantalizing lure of disaster, created at one's own hands. Would it be so bad if I just… gave in?"

"I'll be beside you the entire time, you won't be alone to suffer the consequences. Or, more likely, lavish in the rewards."

Will hums, finally closing the space between them. The kiss is slow, intimate but not intense. He feels no need to push for more, to do anything besides rest a hand on Hannibal's waist as they kiss.

Hannibal sighs as he pulls back for air, brown eyes fluttering open to gaze at him reverently, and Will admits that he can't look any less sappy. He doesn't feel anything besides worshipful, dedicated to his equal like a supplicant praying at the feet of his god. He kisses Hannibal again, deep, lingering kisses that fill him with syrupy happiness until he feels more molasses than man.

"Come over? We can make dinner together and I can hold you like I never plan to let you go and you could fall asleep in my arms," Will asks hopefully as he pulls backs back enough that their lips brush as he speaks.

"I would love nothing more." Hannibal grins and Will wants to pluck the happy crinkles from the corners of his eyes and preserve them in a jar so they never fade. He can't, so he settles for kissing him one last time as he settles back in his seat.

Chapter End Notes

I'm trying to stay caught up on responding to comments, but my email's been fucky and is spreading my AO3 emails across the primary, social, and promotional folders instead of automatically putting them in social as they've been for the past six years, so sometimes I lose track or forget to check. At the latest, it shouldn't be more than two weeks for a response because all your comments mean so much to me!
See you next week! Stay safe!

I Can Hardly Imagine Why You Would Trust These Hands

Chapter Summary

Will gets an unexpected visitor, again. This one is much less polite than the last one. Big violence warning here, I really went ham tonight on the violence

Chapter Notes

Howdy, everybody! Today's chapter title is from Clever Songs by Four Eyes. I cannot stress this enough: I love this band. I only edited this to make sure my precious em dashes are in here, I haven't even read through this again yet. I wrote this in one sitting and I haven't slept nearly all day. I'll edit it later, but I have company tomorrow (later today) so I'm posting at 4 a.m. instead of after 4 p.m.
This is the porniest I can get, for now, I think. Enjoy!
EDIT: I. thought I posted, I genuinely did. I do not know how I missed this. Note to self, don't publish fics at 4 in the morning :/ sorry, everyone. On the plus side, it means that I've edited this for real now

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s snowing by the time they pull up outside of Will’s house. Maybe an inch has built up on the ground. Steam curls around the edges of where his arm rests against the window, the cold biting into his skin through the glass.

Hannibal is trudging around the car and opening Will’s door for him before he can get his seatbelt unbuckled. It’s sweet and so pretentious yet unassuming that Will tosses him a half-smile as he affectionately bumps his shoulder into him as he walks past to unlock the door.

“I can start preparations while you let the dogs out. I won’t start cooking without you unless you tell me to,” Hannibal offers as the two of them angle their bodies to let the dogs scurry past. Buster, ever the fan of snow, immediately begins to leap into the air to catch gently falling snowflakes as they watch.

“That sounds good, yeah. It shouldn’t be too long. Can you bring me gloves first? Ellie wants to play toss.” Will gestures toward the small dog wielding an unreasonably-sized stick, tail wagging so hard her whole body trembles with excitement.

Hannibal nods and heads inside, returning with a pair of expensive-looking, insulated gloves that Will definitely didn’t buy himself. He scoffs at the twinkle in Hannibal’s eye, shaking his head as he grabs Hannibal’s hand as it retreats and presses a kiss to his knuckles before releasing him to hurry back inside.

For the next few minutes, Will plays with the dogs with the sounds of Hannibal opening and closing drawers and pulling bags of fresh produce out of the fridge. He slips his glasses on as the sun’s last rays slip below the horizon, the silhouettes of the dogs beginning to blend into the trees without them.

Ellie tires herself out quick and another eager dog replaces her as she flops onto the porch beside Will, panting breaths puffing out in front of her like dragon smoke. Eventually, all the dogs have finished their business and grown tired of the cold, and he wipes each one’s paws off one at a time to let them snuggle in their beds.

He stops by the fireplace to start a fire before heading to the kitchen. After he lights the match and sticks a flaming sheet of newspaper under the bulk of the pile to catch, he stands with a groan.

His eyes land on the patch of brick that is a slightly different color than the rest, the cement holding them in place less sunbleached than other sections. His fingers trace the path of the repairs, remembering how hurt the animal he thought he had heard sounded. Hannibal did that to him. It’s odd to think about it all without even a lingering trace of anger in him, but he stands there considering how much of it he’s let go and he feels fine.

Hannibal finds him like that, head tilted to one side as he warms his toes on the burgeoning fire. “What thoughts have carried you elsewhere tonight?” he asks, wrapping his arms around Will’s waist and burying his face into the curls at the back of his neck.

“It seemed so big, before. The hallucinations, the betrayal, the gaping hole in the fireplace. But it’s all been patched up now, not undamaged but repaired. It’s not perfect; I did it myself, while severely ill. But the fireplace is functional, and you can’t tell it was ever broken unless

you know where to look or go inspecting up close. It's refreshing, how calm it all is now, how calm I feel."

"Have you begun to patch up the parts of you you felt were missing, rebuilt the image of you to fit the environment better?"

Will considers it for a moment. "You did, I think. Had I not set my anger down for a moment, I might've destroyed all that I was, all that I could be, just to see you suffer. But I saw something shift in you, and I allowed myself time to think about my goals in the long term. Your past is my past, your future my future."

"I would gladly give you all that I am," Hannibal agrees. "All my memories, all my material goods, all of my potential."

Will smiles at that, spinning around in his arms to rest his own across Hannibal's shoulders. His brown eyes reflect the fire behind him, a warm glow that makes him look otherworldly and unending. "What do you want for Christmas? I've never been very big on celebrating it but I think I would enjoy spending the day with you. Week, if Jack lets me off long enough."

"Knowing that you love me, my clever boy, I could never want for anything."

Will blinks, meeting Hannibal's gaze directly now. "Holy shit, you're serious. That's… Incredibly cheesy, Hannibal. Cheesy and romantic and I can't believe that makes me so embarrassingly happy to hear."

Hannibal chuckles into Will's hair when he buries his face in his shoulder to hide the way his cheeks warm.

"I love you. Unrepentantly, unwaveringly, unconditionally. You know that, right? There's nothing you could do that would make me love you less. Incredibly angry, hurt, annoyed, bemused, yes, but my love for you will not waver in the face of anything we encounter, go through, put each other through.

“I learned that in prison; even when I hated you with every fiber of my being, I yearned for you like never before. I saw all of you and I knew that inevitably, I’d give in. And, at the time, that made me furious, and I lashed out, and I wanted to hurt you. And I know that if either of us were normal, we wouldn’t be here right now, but I *need you, Hannibal,* like I need the air I breathe like I need to immerse myself in the shadows to sleep at night.”

Hannibal grips Will’s elbows, drawing him closer. The hug that he traps him in is so immense Will thinks he might be able to hear his ribs creaking, but he can’t find it in him to ask Hannibal to let go at the moment.

“Let’s make dinner now, baby, c’mon,” he encourages after what must be a few minutes.

Hannibal nods against his throat and releases him from his grasp only to tangle their fingers together and lead him to the kitchen. It’s unnecessary, this is Will’s house after all and the kitchen is only a few feet away, but Will knows he needs the contact right now.

Will gazes at the ingredients piled across two cutting boards, a massive pot on the strongest burner. “Soup?” he guesses, glancing at Hannibal.

Hannibal nods. With his free hand, he sets a pile of potatoes on the cutting board closest to Will and clears off the surrounding area for him. Reluctantly, he lets go of Will’s hand and busies himself with pouring boxed chicken stock into the pot and turning the flame on.

Will moves his workstation to the other side of the stove so his left shoulder brushes Hannibal’s while the man busies himself with adding herbs and spices to the broth. Hannibal’s grateful smile lets him know the gesture is appreciated.

They settle on the couch side by side when all that’s left is to let the ingredients soften in the broth. Hannibal sits so close to Will that his thigh is practically in Will’s lap. With a huff, Will slips an arm under his knees and the other behind his back and hefts him up enough to gracelessly plop him onto his lap.

Hannibal gazes down at him with a hint of surprise, his pupils dilating. In a lunge faster than Will can process, he’s attached his mouth to Will’s neck, nibbling at his tendon.

Will tilts his head back to allow Hannibal ease of access, a breathy moan slipping past his lips. His fingers slip into Hannibal's hair.

When Hannibal sucks what's definitely going to be a prominent bruise onto his jawline, Will grunts out a rough *oh fuck.*

Will finally gains the brainpower to trail his fingers along the hem of Hannibal's shirt before stumbling over himself to unbutton his waistcoat and shirt. When the fabric finally parts completely to reveal toned muscles and graying hair, Will slides his hands up Hannibal's torso to grip at his chest.

"You have a penchant for *fondling* me," Hannibal tries to snark, flashing his teeth in a grin. The way he practically sighs the words shows how much he enjoys said fondling.

"You're gorgeous, Hannibal. Can't keep my hands offa you," Will mutters as he shuts Hannibal up by slipping his tongue into his mouth. It must be Will's imagination because his incisors feel extra sharp as he brushes against them, forcing a groan out of him suddenly.

Will's hands eventually settle on Hannibal's waist, thumbs brushing across his stomach as they kiss. He feels dizzy with arousal, turned on by practically everything Hannibal does. Especially the way Hannibal's roaming hands slip into the back of his jeans to tug him bodily closer against Hannibal, rubbing against him in the best way.

Hannibal's eyelashes flutter as Will's head ducks down to trail his tongue across one of his nipples. His hand replaces his mouth so he can bite Hannibal's lower lip and tug him back into a violent kiss. The metallic taste of iron spreads across his tongue and he can't quite gather the will to consider whose it is.

"Will," Hannibal grunts.

Will ignores him in favor of grinding up into him, watching in awe as he tosses his head back to moan at the increased friction. "What?" He finally manages to whisper against Hannibal's

throat.

“Will, the–the soup. We–Fuck!” Hannibal shouts as Will bites savagely at his shoulder, just barely avoiding breaking the skin.

“Fuck the soup, baby. Don’t give a shit about it.” His sudden ability to make Hannibal lose all composure has him grinning savagely.

“ *Will,”* Hannibal admonishes. “I have never ruined a meal and I will not start now even with you distracting, *do that again,* distracting me like this,” Hannibal pouts as Will grinds the heel of his palm into Hannibal’s straining erection.

“You sure you wanna stop?”

Hannibal scowls at the teasing. “You know I don’t. Perhaps we can postpone this until after dinner, so the house may not burn down while we’re naked.”

Will’s hands drop to his side and he pulls back suddenly, leaving Hannibal scrambling for balance. “Good point. How much time is left on the soup?”

Hannibal tugs his crumpled sleeve up enough to check his watch. “It should be ready now. We should check it to make sure it doesn’t boil over.”

With a disappointed sigh, Hannibal slips off of Will’s lap, adjusting himself and heading into the kitchen.

Will flops his head back onto the couch. “Damn the soup,” he grumbles to himself.

“Will?” Hannibal’s voice calls from the kitchen. “Would you like tea or hot chocolate? The fire’s nearly burned out so the chill is starting to set in again.”

“Hot chocolate, if you can find the ingredients for it.”

Eventually, they settle at the dining room table, chairs scooted close enough their elbows brush every time Will lifts his spoon to sip at his soup. Their mugs are filled to the brim with hot chocolate, thick and steaming and piled high with whipped cream.

Will laughs when Hannibal daintily licks off a chocolate mustache and he retaliates by sneaking a spoonful of potatoes and creamy broth when Will is distracted taking a big swig of hot chocolate.

Dinner is mostly silent as they enjoy each other’s company and the relaxing warmth of their meal. When their bowls are cleared and their dishes have been washed, Hannibal offers to put the leftovers away while Will lets the dogs out.

Will agrees, and he drapes himself in jackets and a fuzzy hat before letting the three dogs who need a bathroom break outside. They rush out into the snow, fuzzy bodies darting this way and that in the outer reaches of the patio light.

Buster must catch onto a rabbit’s scent or something else because all of a sudden he tenses, his entire body freezing before he darts into the trees.

“Buster!” Will calls out, not worrying much but still keeping an ear out for any sounds that could reveal what his mischievous dog has gotten himself into.

A sharp yelp echoes through the forest and Will darts forward before he can think to consider the danger, giving a sharp whistle to send the other dogs scurrying back inside.

It doesn’t take long to find Buster, the small body panting harshly. A long but shallow gash runs down his side and curves onto his leg and Will carefully scoops him up before rushing back into the house.

Hannibal has seemingly jumped into preparing them for a fight, the other dogs secluded into a bedroom upstairs and Will's shotgun pressed into his hands without a word. His arms gently take Buster from Will and he brings the dog upstairs while Will shuts off the last few lights on the bottom floor so the intruder can't see his whereabouts from wherever they're lurking.

As Hannibal rests a hand on his shoulder supportively, a mass bursts through the window to their left. The figure recovers quickly enough that Will has barely managed to lift the shotgun in its direction before its head snaps towards them.

It lunges and Will uses the butt of the shotgun to smash the side of its head in. Or, what should've been its head, if not for the complex assembly of gears and animal skull that lessen the impact. Instead, it's knocked back, dazed.

Will surges forward and hits it again with the shotgun before tossing it to the side, far out of anyone's reach.

Hannibal has made his way to the kitchen, slipping out of view. The beast's focus hones onto Will, now unarmed. Will tries to toss it to the floor completely for an advantage, but its teeth gnash too close to his arm and he reels back.

Out of the corner of his eye, in the beast's blind spot, Hannibal slips from the kitchen, Will's biggest knife in his grasp. As the beast's muscles flex in preparation to leap at Will from all fours, Hannibal jumps onto its back and uses the extra force to embed the knife into its side. His fingers scramble to tug it across the beast's abdomen, to slip the flesh of its stomach open and send its organs spilling, but the knife catches on a piece of its suit before it can go far.

The beast manages to thrash to its feet, slamming backward into the wall to dislodge Hannibal. His head flops backward violently into the wall and he slips off the beast's back as it jerks out of his grasp. It swivels around and dives for Hannibal, its teeth nearly slicing through his throat if not for the arm he throws up at the last moment.

The fangs sink into his flesh easily and Will slinks forward in the distraction to jerk the knife out of the beast's side and into its shoulder. Its jaws jerk open as the man inside lets out a silent scream. Will leaps onto its back, fingers digging into the mechanism of its jaws and prying the mandible off its face entirely as a screw pops off.

The beast swivels to the side and Will's leg jerks out to push them off of the wall. They fly forward, Will's head slamming into his lure-making table. His vision goes dark for a moment, and all he can hear is Hannibal's panicked shout.

A metallic groan reveals the beast's position, not far from him. When Will can finally focus his eyes enough to see more than shadows, he sees the beast ram into Hannibal. The two of them fight, with Hannibal weakened now from the gashes in his arm. The beast tries to use its upper fangs to scrape at Hannibal's face and Will forces himself to his feet.

He grips the table for balance, finally noting the knife gripped tightly in his hand. He must've pulled it free as he fell.

Before the beast can sink its fangs into Hannibal once more, he stumbles forward, falling onto the beast. He uses his momentum to lodge the knife into the beast's throat. He feels the snap of its spinal cord severing under the force and he grins.

He tosses the beast off of Hannibal, barely managing the strength to get it to flop beside Hannibal and roll onto its back. The angle reveals the tip of the knife protruding from the beast's throat. The blade had gone straight through.

Will offers a hand to Hannibal and helps him to his feet, crumpling into his arms as soon as he's up. His weight sends them stumbling back a few steps but Hannibal is quick to steady them.

"You were beautiful, Will," Hannibal whispers as he leads them toward the bed, pointedly avoiding the corpse bleeding out on the floor.

"It was everything I've ever wanted, and more," Will admits. He nuzzles his face into Hannibal's shoulder when they stop moving. Dizziness overtakes him momentarily, and when it resides he finds himself sitting on the bed, Hannibal kneeling at his feet.

“Are you dizzy, Will?”

He nods slowly. “Head feels… fuzzy. ‘M tired.”

Hannibal scowls. “You likely have a concussion. Lay down, I’ll keep watch over you. Do you have a medical kit with suture gear? I believe I’ll need stitches.”

Will points in the direction of the bathroom and Hannibal nods. His hands gently hold his shoulders as he lowers Will into a propped-up position on the pillows. He heads to the bathroom, Will wincing from the light as it flicks on for a minute.

He hears some shuffling, then the water runs for a moment, then silence. Will doesn’t know how much time has passed, but eventually, Hannibal’s footsteps approach. He doesn’t remember closing his eyes but now that he’s aware of it a wave of exhaustion greater than before rushes over him.

Hannibal’s weight dips the mattress beside him and he tilts his head enough to rest it on Hannibal’s shoulder. “Stay with me?”

“Where else would I go, sweet boy?” Hannibal’s hand cards through his hair and soon everything fades to black.

Hannibal wakes him up a few times to make sure he doesn’t die in his sleep, but eventually, he deems it safe enough for him to get more than a handful of hours of rest at a time and Will gladly slips back into sleep as Hannibal putters about, getting rid of the evidence.

Will dreams, that night.

He stands on a snowy outcropping, in a break between the trees. He’s hunched over in a prowl, his eyes trained on the little two-story house where his prey lurks. He salivates at the idea of bloodshed.

His surroundings shift and he's standing in his living room, shotgun in his hands. The beast pants in front of him, moonlight gleaming brokenly off the shattered glass surrounding them.

He isn't sure who moves first, but next thing he knows, he's straddling the thin body beneath him, wrenching mechanical jaws apart to reveal the weak insides of the beast. A young face snarls up at him.

He jerks his fist back and punches. Once, twice, three times, again and again until he loses track. At some point the face's features beneath him begin to blur, revealing sharp cheekbones and thin lips pulled back into a vicious, bloody grin. The smile feels adoring, and longing rushes over him. Suddenly, Randall Tier's face stares back at him, broken and bloody. It feels better than what he had seen before, though he isn't aware enough to recall whose face he had momentarily become

He has the thought of *if I wanted to get away with calling this self-defense, I should stop here.* He considers it a moment, then his hands slip between the beast's broken jaws, one hand gripping Tier's hair in a punishing grip and the other settling on his chin. He wrenches his head to the left in a brutal motion.

The snap of his spine echoes through the room, replacing the heavy pants that stop forcing their way through Tier's lungs.

Will blinks, and he's standing above Tier, his body angled to display the knife jutting through his throat. Will tilts the body over to get a grip on the knife and *tugs* and reaches for the corpse's arm, angling the knife to strip away the flesh so he can sink his teeth into his successful kill and–

"Will?" A voice cuts through the dream and Will blearily peers up at the figure hovering over him.

"You were starting to move in your sleep, are you alright?"

Will blinks, gathering his thoughts as the memory of the dream flashes in front of his eyes in brief scenes. “Just… had a good dream.”

As he says it, he knows it’s true. He startles at the fact that this was a *dream,* a genuine dream. Not a hallucination, not one of Hannibal’s memories, a dream that his mind created to process his memories and help him deal with what he’s feeling. He hasn’t dreamed in over six months, and the realization sends a chill down his spine.

Hannibal misses his silent panic as he heads back into the kitchen after Will’s reassurances. Before he can reemerge, Will takes a deep breath in and releases it slowly, relaxing his face to hide whatever lingering panic he’s feeling.

“Besides a concussion, your ankle is fractured. I needed twelve stitches to seal up the teeth marks in my forearm, but besides a bit of a bump on the back of my head, that’s the extent of my injuries.”

“Do we tell Jack we were mugged? I can’t imagine ‘we teamed up to murder our murder suspect and then hid the body’ would fly with him.”

“Hm, yes, I suspect not. Mugged is a perfect idea. We were in a shadier part of Baltimore, I was trying to get some last-minute Christmas shopping done for your coworkers when three men approached us. They had guns, and one of them also had a knife, and they attacked us when we failed to comply with satisfactory haste. I received some minor scrapes, but you were pushed and one of them stepped on your ankle before fleeing with my wallet. They wore masks so we couldn’t see any discerning features, and we didn’t see where they went. We didn’t call the police because I was dazed and convinced that I could fix our wounds at your home, where we spent the rest of the night licking our wounds.”

Will raises an eyebrow. “You have a story like that pre-scripted for whenever you’ll need it or what?”

“Of course,” Hannibal scoffs at him like Will was the one being ridiculous. “It’s important to have an alibi for any potential injuries sorted out before one might need to make use of it, so the details are less likely to get mixed up upon retelling.”

“Alright. So, I’ll call Jack to let him know I’m not in good shape to be in the field for a little bit unless he’s willing to chauffeur me around and pay for a wheelchair for me. Or a boot.”

“Perhaps it’s best we skip that last bit, lest Jack takes you seriously and whisk you away to view crime scenes from the nearest wheelchair-accessible viewpoint. You might need binoculars. Serial killers don’t tend to consider accessibility when leaving corpses across Baltimore.”

“Mm, yeah. Hand me my phone, will you? Thanks.” He isn’t looking forward to this phone call but it’s better than sitting alone and considering *what* exactly might be causing Will’s spontaneous foray into dreaming as though he hasn’t perpetually existed in Hannibal’s mind palace for half a year.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, those are intentional reverses of the Hannigram convos post-Dolarhyde murder and Tier delivery! I love those scenes and this AU would not allow me to replicate them so I adapted.
Stay safe! See ya next week

My Head's Not Yours, It's Mine

Chapter Summary

Will texts Bev and samples from the lab reveal what everyone expected. Hannibal has a proposition to make.

Chapter Notes

Pardon the delayed posting, my migraines decided to darken my doorstep, as the saying goes. The chapter title is from the song Old Witch Sleep and the Good Man Grace by The Amazing Devil. Shorter chapter this week but I've got Big Things coming soon, a finale of sorts.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next few days, Will spends his time playing with his dogs, texting Beverly, and sending the occasional check-in email to Abigail or waiting for the moment his phone rings with a call from Margot, wherever she is.

But, eventually, he grows tired of the peace, the slow trickle by of each minute, the way the tick-tick of the second hand of the old clock in the hall seems to echo through his head until it overwhelms every other sound. It’s the closest he’s gotten to replicating the trapped isolation of the BSHCI that he’s stumbled upon since he was released. He has his dogs, and Hannibal stops by every day to make sure he’s eating properly and to examine his ankle, but it’s barely enough to keep him from bursting through Quantico, screaming for Jack to put him on a case before he snaps.

The day that Hannibal gently presses his fingers into the tendons of his ankle and declares it healed enough for him to walk without worry, Margot finally calls.

It’s a random number he doesn’t recognize, but the tinny, whispered voice that greets him from the speakers makes him breathe a sigh of relief. He knew that Margot was smart, but the confirmation that she’s being careful enough to call from a burner phone purchased in some

small shop in a shady side of whatever small European city she's hunkered down in at the moment.

Hannibal peers curiously at him from across the kitchen so Will puts it on speaker.

"I'm alright. This is my eighth time switching planes, trains, or boats at the last minute to throw off any potential tails. I'll stay here for a week or so, long enough for me to verify if I am pregnant."

"Have you made sure to change your appearance enough to throw off any do-gooders that could sound alarms at Muskrat Farm?" Hannibal chimes in from where he pipes custard into handmade--of course they are, the pretentious dork--puff pastries.

"Dr. Lecter. Good morning, or evening for you two I suppose. I'd like to apologize for not calling ahead to let you know that I'd miss our last appointment but I prioritized my safety over politeness. I'll make it up to you when I'm able. Yes, I've gotten a haircut and I've decided to dress more similarly to Will than to anything I was allowed to wear before now."

Margot doesn't sound regretful, merely doing what she knows is proper, but the way Hannibal grins like he's unsurprised by her lack of conviction suggests that he was well aware of her limited remorse long before this phone call.

Something in Will relaxes, the realization that Margot isn't likely to stumble upon Hannibal's ire while she's struggling to save herself from her brother's malignant presence. On some level, Hannibal wants to see her succeed. And so if Will wants her safe, he'll make sure she stays that way.

Hannibal glances at Will and quirks an eyebrow at his unwavering gaze. Will continues watching him, tuning back into the call.

"Yes, it should be no more than four days until a test should confirm it," Margot replies to whatever question Hannibal had asked.

“Call if you want to. Maybe Hannibal can get you more permanent accommodations for when you get further along and travel gets tedious,” Will speaks up.

“Travel’s already tedious,” she snarks, “but I’d rather keep going for a couple of months still before I feel comfortable enough to settle down.”

“Once you do, give us a call and I can give you the address of one of my nearest properties purchased under an alias.”

“Thank you, Dr. Lecter. And thank you, Will. I don’t know how long I could have continued as I was.”

“You’re strong, Margot. You’d have found your way without Will’s help. Reaching out for assistance isn’t a weakness; you were very brave to do what you did.” Hannibal has his therapist's voice on and hearing it for the first time since their first interactions only reminds him how informal their doctor-patient relationship was from the beginning.

The call ends soon after that and the two of them continue their tasks, Will winding thread around bits of Randall Tier’s vertebra and bits of velvety antler he’d saved from the last mating season and Hannibal finishing up their dinner, also primarily featuring Tier’s body.

They feast on thin slices of pink meat gracefully folded over freshly baked crispy bread and layered with crisp tomatoes and lettuce, knees brushing under the table they’re sitting so close together. Hannibal slips bites of their dessert between Will’s parted lips, delicately thumbing off the occasional bit of flaky pastry or rich cream from the corner of his mouth.

Will feels cherished, revered the way the gods must have when their followers flocked to their temples in the thousands to throw themselves to their knees in worship, arms filled with rich foods and gleaming gems to honor them with material goods. It’s a heady feeling, and it makes Will ache to drop to his knees to worship Hannibal in his own way. He would spend hours shaping raw materials into gleaming knives, sprawling tables for his dinner parties, and gleaming white bones twisted into sprawling, pointless statues that only serve to disturb those unprepared for Hannibal’s peculiar flavor of room decor.

Will does his best to let Hannibal have a taste of the worshipping that Will will soon lavish upon him by kissing him long and sweet when he stands at the door to leave. He has several appointments the following day, starting early in the morning, so he cannot stay. But, Hannibal promises, he will return soon.

Will has to temper his enthusiasm by reminding him that he's going back to work officially tomorrow as well. It's not wholly effective.

Will lays in bed for an hour anxiously staring at the ceiling. For some terrifying reason, he hasn't dreamed of Hannibal's mind palace since the night Tier attacked. He's been avoiding visiting during the day because he's terrified that he had imagined all of it. How much of his relationship is based on hallucinations if it's not real? Is Abigail even alive?

He texted Beverly last night asking if she knows about the dream-sharing. *Why wouldn't i?* She responded, near immediately despite the late hour as he sat in bed cradling his phone to his chest. He didn't respond.

Now though, he needs the reassurance. *I started dreaming. Afraid i'd made it all up,* he sends, trying to ignore the slight tremor in his hands.

Don't overthink, i can hear u overthinkn. He huffs out a shaky laugh at that as he watches the little dots bounce as she types up her next message. *Mayb its like i said. He's figured smthn out*

I hope it's just that, he sends back.

STFU graham nothns gonna break ur freakazoid bond w ur boifrnd

Your shorthand is incomprehensible.

Stop changing the subject!!!! I no ur worried but theres no need to i promise

Will smiles at his phone. *Thanks, Bev. see you tomorrow.*

C ya nerd Xp

Will flops backward on the bed, fumbling to set his phone on the nightstand. It's nearly 1 in the morning, maybe Hannibal will be asleep soon.

He closes his eyes, exhaling deeply to let the tension seep from his body before he tries to appear in Hannibal's mind palace. He aims to appear in the version of Hannibal's office that connects with their more recent, intimate moments. It's the first time he tries to start anywhere other than the chapel of the foyer, and he's almost surprised to open his eyes to find himself surrounded by bookshelves instead of sky-high stained glass portraits.

He's never been so relieved to see Hannibal's office, the terrible curtains and familiar ladder leading to the second floor forcing a sigh of relief from him.

That night, he never manages to see Hannibal, but he isn't particularly concerned about that. His mind palace is vast and predicting what memory he might decide to visit in his sleep is an uphill battle, to say the least. Hannibal has stored more than 40 years of memories in here and though Will has spent every night for the past half-year roaming these halls he's at a severe disadvantage.

Jack texts him that morning to ask him down to the lab before his first lesson, an astounding amount of restraint on his part. Will lets him know when he'll be there and Jack sends a thumbs-up emoji of all things.

He hefts himself out of bed and into the shower, nudging Ellie with his foot so that she isn't standing directly in the door's path, a back and forth struggle of wills they go through every time he goes to the bathroom. She whines as the door clicks shut before she can scramble back into place to block it from closing. Will's heart aches with her loneliness, the fear of *what if* that half a decade of living with Will never fully managed to overpower.

An abandoned dog can sometimes stay an abandoned dog, even when the abandoner is long gone and your new owner always manages to come back. Will can't know if Ellie has the critical thinking skill to know logically that Will won't leave her, but he hopes that it's there, always fighting against the instinct to stop him from walking out the door one last time.

Will is glad that, on a fundamental level, his psyche is *acutely aware* of the fact that Hannibal is physically incapable of abandoning Will. Hannibal's love for him is so deeply embedded into the man that to separate him from it would be destroying an integral aspect of what Hannibal has become. It's a novel experience, letting go of the abandoned boy of his youth, the one so scared of losing the people he loves that he doesn't let himself love anyone in the first place.

This train of thought sticks in his mind as he drives to Quantico, reverberates in his skull with every step down the stairs to the lab. The bone-deep confidence in Hannibal pulses stronger with every beat of his heart, flows through him with his blood to infuse every organ, nerve-ending, and muscle all the way down to his cells.

Bev is the first person he sees when he enters the lab. She's inhaling coffee like it's the last breath of air on earth and he thinks that if it weren't for the coffee Hannibal left him to reheat he'd be doing the same right now.

Zeller hardly looks any better, squinting in the harsh light of the lab and blinking frequently. He looks like he got painfully close to pulling an all-nighter in the lab. Price, on the other hand, grins at him pleasedly like the chipper morning person he is.

Jack bustles into the lab soon after Will, looking exhausted but determined, as usual. He flops a case file on an empty slab between the five of them. "Everything we have on the Chesapeake Ripper, hundreds of days of analysis and dozens of minds working together and we can't find a single thing that won't incriminate an innocent man!"

"We have evidence," Bev counters. "Nothing that seems to point away from Doctor Lecter, but we do have two sets of finger- and footprints. Both, assumedly, female, adults, and one partial thumbprint that is a definitive match to Miriam Lass. That's not nothing, Jack."

"If Lass resurfaces, she's our best bet to catch the Ripper. She didn't just vanish into thin air; we're looking at proof that she is not only alive but out there somewhere doing whatever it is

escaped kidnappees do after two and a half years of basement-dwelling," Price chirps.

Will meets Jack's gaze. "We'll find her or she'll find us. You know her best; do you think she can be the final piece we're missing to catch this guy?"

Jack's eyes go vacant like he's lost in the past. "She'll be the one to drive the knife into the bastard, literally or metaphorically. It's this other woman that she's with that I'm worried about. Miriam knows serial killers, she's smarter than all of us. But if this is someone whose pathology isn't documented in a textbook, I don't know how she'll react. I didn't get to see her in action with civilians."

He's afraid that she's *too* prepared for interacting with criminals. Will's seen it before back in the NOPD, officers who forgot how to interact with average folks, always viewing everyone as a potential danger, never able to relax. If Lass is in this mindset, which is even more likely than random cops in a high-crime city since the only person she's interacted with for literal years is the most infamous serial killer of the century this side of the Mississippi. Even if the person who rescued her is doing it out of the kindness of their heart, she might mistake an innocent offer of assistance as another attempt on her life. She's a loaded gun and when that's pointed at the Ripper it's fine but this new unknown sends genuine fear coursing through Jack until–

Will tears his gaze away, shivering the weight of Jack's mind off of his shoulders. A nearly overwhelming wave of disappointment washes over him. He's embarrassed that it took so long to realize that Jack is driven by fear as much as he is. Fear of losing another agent, fear of losing his wife, fear of being the reason that a killer keeps killing. Fear, guilt, and anger, all building up and clawing at his lungs and trying to one-up each other, to varying levels of success.

Will stares at the shoeprints in the dust from the cabin, a lingering trickle of Jack's fear worms its way down his spine but he smothers it. Abigail isn't a civilian, she's just as prepared for action as Miriam, but she has the upper hand. She's physically and mentally sound, whereas Lass has been kept near-constantly in a perpetual state of unconsciousness. That, and Abigail emailed him two days ago.

His eyes trace the path that Abigail had walked that night as her words echo in his mind. *Miriam's shaken, but recovering quickly. I'm proud of her. She helped me find a doctor for*

her prosthetic and she agrees that a cover story behind her injury is for the best. After the appointment, we'll get in contact with Lounds. I'm not looking forward to it.

The memory of her wry smile makes the corner of his lips twitch and he has to blink himself out of the motion before Zeller gives him nasty looks again.

In the end, the meeting was more of a morale-builder than dissemination of information. Will is heading off to his classroom before the fifteen-minute mark but the consensus seems to be hopeful anticipation for if--when--Miriam resurfaces.

~

It's Friday, so after his classes, he finds himself at Hannibal's doorstep, a nice bottle of wine in hand. He suspects it's one of Hannibal's favorites given how frequently he drinks it when they're talking into the late hours of the night.

Hannibal gives him that pleased squint-smile when he recognizes the label. He's glad he's pleased by his gift since it cost him more than $300. Like a good host, Hannibal helps him out of his coat, then like a besotted partner, his hands linger on Will's shoulders as he leads him into the study.

"I am once again surprised by your attention to detail, mylimasis. You know a guest is more than satisfied when they return bearing such a considerate gift. Did you know that the first time I had Gran Passione Rosso, I was visiting Venice with my Aunt? It was the first time I had pursued someone sexually, I spent a great deal of time, effort, and money to sway him into sleeping with a foreigner with a thick accent, despite having perfect pronunciation. I found a deeper love for this wine than anything he had to offer me."

Will flops into his seat, taking a swig of his brandy. "You trying to make me jealous? How uncouth of you, Doctor Lecter," he teases.

Hannibal grins at him from behind his wine glass. "Is it working?"

Will doesn't deign that with a response. Instead, he says, "Jack called me down to the lab today. It's confirmed that Miriam Lass was the one held there but no definite trace of Abigail was left behind."

"She learned from the best. Her father was exceptional at not leaving evidence behind."

Garret Jacob Hobbs. The lingering tackiness of his mentality bites the back of Will's throat like stomach acid.

"Where have you gone?" Hannibal questions.

"Considering the remnants of Garret Jacob Hobbs in my head," Will says as he taps his index finger against his temple. "And the effects of his prolonged presence."

Hannibal hums, delaying while he sips his wine. "Enargeia. The overwhelming of the mind with a story so vivid you enter the story. It's quite like your empathy, is it not?"

"I… interpret so vividly a scene that I insert myself into it. Yes, I suppose that sounds similar. It's all just imaginations running at maximum effort. But, I don't have the luxury of it all being a story."

"Would you want to minimize it all to just that?"

Will recalls how it felt to see through Tier's eyes in his dreams, the violent satisfaction that he gets from each crime scene he visits. "No. I sometimes wonder if it's even enough."

"You got a taste of the real thing with Randall Tier. Will you be able to restrict yourself to just the lingering whispers that you find at your crime scenes?"

Will meets his gaze, taking in every minute detail of his brown eyes that he can manage from the slight distance between them. They're like soil, or milk chocolate, fresh and delicate.

“I think we both know that they haven’t been truly enough for a long time now. But I’m patient; I know that delayed gratification makes the reward that much sweeter.”

Hannibal’s eyes gleam with barely concealed excitement. “I have an extra ticket to the upcoming performance of *L’elisire d’amore* . I’d love for you to accompany me. It’s tomorrow evening.”

Will snorts, raising an eyebrow at Hannibal. “And you’re asking me so late so that I don’t have time to change my mind. That would have worked a few months ago but I told you I want to see you in your element so I can stake my claim on you publicly. I meant it. I’ll go. I’m assuming you have another suit for me?”

Hannibal dips his head in a nod. The fire has grown large enough that he slips his jacket off, revealing that he’s neglected a waistcoat today. “I’ll not spoil the plot; the performance will be in Italian but the concert hall has a captioning system installed above the stage in both English and Italian. Though I imagine the emotions of the story will be context enough for you.”

“When should I get here then?”

“Why not stay the night? We can stop by your house tomorrow before lunch to visit the dogs, and it isn’t too late to ask a neighbor to check on them tonight.”

Will nods, pulling out his phone to call his neighbor.

Chapter End Notes

Don't trust that wine, I don't know if it's good or not. I don't drink wine and even if I did, a $350 wine is not one I'd buy. I just googled fancy Italian wines and found a decent looking website with egregious prices, ha
Stay safe see you next week!

Long Ago, That Current Caught Us

Chapter Summary

Will goes to the opera and makes Hannibal cry.

Chapter Notes

The chapter title is from The Calling by The Amazing Devil. This week, I have no excuse for being late, really. I spontaneously spent the night at my girlfriend's instead of finishing this on time. Next week, it will be early. I'm promising ahead of time so I guilt myself into actually doing that

See the end of the chapter for more notes

That night, Will searches Hannibal's mind palace for any sign of the man—to no avail. By the time he can feel the sun's warmth on his face and exhaustion seeping into his bones, he's stopped by nearly every main hallway, collection of rooms, and common paths that Hannibal takes. No warm doorknobs, no lingering sense of his familiar presence, and absolutely no half-finished memories for him to walk in on. It's like Hannibal stopped visiting at night.

Maybe, he thinks bitterly, *he's gotten bored of reliving our memories.* He frowns at himself at the thought. He knows he doesn't mean it, doesn't believe that even for a second Hannibal could grow bored of him or the memories they share. He's just frustrated and tired, bitchy that the first time he slips into Hannibal's mind palace since he was seemingly rudely ejected he can't even find the man himself.

He can feel Hannibal beside him stirring as he wakes up. He cracks one eye open to watch as Hannibal flips over in his arms. His eyes are closed but his whole face scrunches when a beam of light falls on his face. Judging by the low angle, Will guesses it's only 7.

Without ever opening his eyes, Hannibal drags Will across the small gap between them and presses his face into his neck, inhaling deeply then sighing.

“There’s a reason you wake up so early, huh? Despite everything, you’re not a morning person,” Will mumbles, voice raspy with disuse.

Hannibal shakes his head. Will huffs out a breath when his hair tickles his nose.

“You wanna get up? I can make breakfast if you don’t.”

Hannibal wrestles one of his arms out from between them, hand tilted like he’s going for a handshake before making it hop forward a small distance. Will’s nowhere near fluent but he’s worked with enough Deaf people to pick up a few things.

He huffs a laugh. “Later? ‘S fine with me. Don’t complain if I fall back asleep though,” he warns.

He makes good on his promise; not ten minutes later is he fast asleep, dreaming of a monster with Hannibal’s face lovingly feeding him strips from Randall Tier’s corpse.

Hannibal wakes him with brunch in bed, though he insists on calling it breakfast because it’s the first meal of the day, no matter how close to noon it’s gotten. He feeds Will bits of bacon and waffles with strawberry bits in them. It’s not an exact replica of his dream, but Hannibal has managed to get shockingly close to the point that Will has to secretly pinch himself to check that he’s actually awake.

Eventually, Hannibal drags him out of bed and into the bath. It’s just as luxurious as the last one but since it’s earlier in the day, Hannibal joins him in the water. He presses his back against Hannibal’s chest and enjoys the feeling of his fingers carefully and meticulously untangling each curl. He gets to lavish Hannibal in gentle caresses and short kisses pressed to his shoulders, collarbones, and the back of his neck when they switch places.

When they both smell of cedar and lilac and have cleaned every inch of each other, Hannibal lifts Will out of the water, depositing him on the bathmat while he climbs out himself. It’s impressive, watching each muscle flex and shift with each movement while Hannibal shows no signs of strain.

They dress in lounge pants and sweaters and Hannibal pulls out his fuzziest slippers to make Will laugh and keep the chill of the tile from their feet. They have a small snack of bite-sized sandwiches and a small salad before meandering back upstairs to get dressed. The performance itself doesn't start until 5, but if Hannibal wants enough time to show Will off—and vice versa—he argues that they should arrive no later than 4. Will's terrible at denying him when he looks so contentedly at him so he agrees to arrive early.

Their suits match again, though more subtly this time. Will gets the feeling that he wants a moment where everyone questions the nature of their relationship before the final reveal. So he wears an all-black suit with a checkered black and burgundy bowtie and gleaming white pocket square tucked into his breast pocket. Hannibal matches, his jacket, waistcoat, and pants the same checkered pattern, and his pockets and lapel crisp white. His tie, shockingly enough, is pitch black just like Will's suit and is delicately tucked into his waistcoat before it's primly buttoned up.

It's incredibly modest of a pattern for Hannibal and Will suspects the change is an effort to make Will feel more comfortable, likely as thanks for even considering attending if the hopeful look in Hannibal's eye means anything. It's considerate, and almost out of character for Hannibal. On their next outing, Will is going to go all out, just to surprise him.

On the car ride, staccato violin whispers from the sound system as they talk.

"You hadn't slept. Was there anything in particular that kept your mind from settling?" Hannibal questions.

"I'm so used to you being in my head constantly that when you aren't, I feel adrift. It's the closest I get to how I used to be before the BSHCI, ironically."

"You dream, but not of me?" Will nods so Hannibal continues. "That disturbs you now. I find myself in a… similar situation. Everything familiar in my dream state has slipped through my fingers and been replaced by fragments of you. I see your stream when I close my eyes."

He continues to speak, but all Will can hear is the rush of blood in his ears, his heartbeat picking up. Adrenaline rushes through his veins and he feels contained, with too many

thoughts and not enough time to process any of them.

“I dream of us, but it feels more like I’m watching you dream than anything I could conjure up. Sometimes, the contented state of it lingers after I wake and I see bits and pieces when I close my eyes, pure symbolism and blatant fantasies merging as a pair of rivers do to form a confluence.”

“What did you dream of tonight?” Will knows he sounds unusually hopeful, but he can’t seem to care enough to try to smother the barely concealed curiosity in his voice.

“Tonight, it was fleeting, whisps of memories that I’m certain are mine but feel distant like I’m watching from someone else’s perspective. When I made breakfast, I could almost feel the sensation of meat between my fingers, hand-feeding you as your head rested in my lap. I had to recreate it; I regret not having considered pampering you so sooner.”

They pull to a stop at a red light and Will can feel Hannibal’s intense gaze on him, though he does not give in and return the gesture. “Will? Are you alright? You smell nervous, almost.”

Will lets out a high-pitched laugh, almost manic. “I think we need to talk when we get home. For now, just hold my hand.”

Hannibal does, gently resting his hand on top of Will’s as it grips his knee. “If you are not feeling up to this, we can reschedule. No opera is more important to me than your comfort.”

“I know, I know. It’s not that, I promise. I think this will be good for me, actually. A reprieve from the Will Graham who hunts serial killers and is dating one. Pretending to be Will Graham: house husband or simple teacher might be fun.

“After all, it’s not really lying, is it? I could be any of those, and in some way I am, it’s just not nearly the whole picture. It’s different from the persona I wore every day, simpler and easy to switch between. And the only people in on the joke are the two of us.”

The look Hannibal sends him is so besotted Will can barely come to terms with the fact that the man who was so protective of his freedom that he sent Will to jail is the one gazing at him with such unrestrained adoration. He huffs a laugh and kisses the back of Hannibal's hand when he turns to focus on the road again.

The valet takes the car while Hannibal links their elbows and escorts Will up the grand staircase leading to the massive front entrance. They check their coats before winding their way through the crowd blocking the entrance to the lobby.

Deep red carpets absorb every footstep and the room is illuminated by massive sconces that reflect their light off the chandelier hanging from the ceiling. A thousand tiny crystals hang overhead, the reflections of the crowd inverted in each. Hundreds of shallow personalities bounce off of Will, boring affairs and tedious stories of business successes flicking through his mind at a glance.

Most of the crowd oozes wealth and a selfish, terrified need for attention. Some, like the slight, older woman honed in on Hannibal's presence like a shark during a chumming, are more discreet, less unsure of herself. Immediately, he's certain that this woman might be one of the few people in the world Hannibal might genuinely consider a friend.

"Hannibal," she greets, "it's been so long. You've been hiding away."

"Miss Komeda, it's always a pleasure. Forgive my distracted state, my attention as of late has been stolen from me."

Without hesitation, her gaze slides from Hannibal onto Will. She sweeps her eyes up and down his form appreciatively. "I can see why. You always manage to find the pretties creatures, and I bet this one's much more interesting than that Dr. Bloom you brought with you a few months ago. She was sweet, but saw things too black and white to hold your interest long."

Will quirks an eyebrow at Hannibal petulantly. "I'm familiar with Alana. She is quite a bore; Hannibal really must've been bored out of his mind to play romance with her for long. Will Graham, It's a pleasure to meet you."

She moves to shake his hand when he offers, but he stops the motion before it can begin, lifting it to kiss the back of her hand. Miss Komeda preens, sending an encouraging glance towards Hannibal.

“Hannibal, you’d best keep a tight leash on your boy, lest I steal him from you. He’s quite the charmer.”

Hannibal’s eyes crinkle and his upper lip curls in that odd way it does when he smiles. “Will is singular that way. He knows exactly how to get what he wants when he wants it.”

“And what do I want?” Will teases, one hand sweeping the carefully constructed wild mass of curls back from his forehead.

“To show off, of course.”

Will clicks his tongue. “How dreadful, have I become predictable?” He turns back to Komeda as though she can provide him the answer he’s looking for.

“Never, dearest, merely honest. If we’re showing off, you must allow me to tell you about Will’s work in the field.”

“Oh?” Hook, line, and sinker, all three of them can see the segue as the bait it is, and yet Komeda’s curiosity forces her to bite anyway. At this point, a small herd of fans, both of Komeda and Hannibal, have joined their little circle, and they hang on to every word of their back-and-forth. Lemmings, the lot of them.

“I work as a consultant for the FBI. I visit crime scenes and help build a profile of the killer, their motive, how likely they are to kill again, their process. That’s how I met Hannibal, he was asked to consult on the same case I was. He picked my brain, and I his, and the rest, as they say, was history.”

One woman, twiglike and adorned in diamonds—fake, only there to distract from the fact that she's one of the few not dressed in designer, hand-tailored clothes, something she's had to give up recently—gasps dramatically, blue eyes widening in mock horror. "Oh," She whimpers, "how terrifying! You're so brave, getting so close to the rejects of society to keep them away from the rest of us. How do you manage?"

"An admittedly concerning amount of coffee and a strong separation between work and home, I suppose."

She nods aggressively, like a bobblehead.

Komeda presses her lips together, the red of her lipstick disappearing as she holds in laughter. "And a good therapist, I suppose?"

Their growing audience glances between Will and Hannibal.

"Oh no, therapy doesn't work on me. I know all the tricks."

"Therapy also doesn't work on those unwilling to cooperate with their therapists," Hannibal adds accusingly.

"It doesn't work too well if you fuck your patient, I suppose, but I suppose we might never know the specifics of that since you're not my therapist." Will frowns like the comment hit a nerve, practically pouting as he refuses to meet Hannibal's gaze.

Komeda chirps out a laugh, a dainty thing that scatters to the wind as soon as it's escaped her lungs. The three of them intentionally ignore the scandalous looks on some of their audience's faces. Will can tell that none of them are disgusted by the fact that Hannibal and Will are in a relationship, though his crassness—and potential insult directed at Hannibal—has upset their delicate sensibilities.

Will allows Hannibal to take over the conversation there, stepping back to cling to his elbow with a not-so-exaggerated besotted look on his face. His act endears him to many of Hannibal's other acquaintances. Though, he notes a not-insignificant group that seems vaguely hostile towards Will, particularly a group of mothers with their younger, prissy children that they had hoped would appeal to Hannibal eventually, despite their complete lack of personality.

The lights flicker above as the speaker system pulses with two mid-range beeps. At that, the horde begins to disburse. Hannibal's hand on his waist presses him forward, leading them to a smaller doorway that few people have headed in the direction of.

They're seated in the orchestra section at the very front of the auditorium, right in the middle of the bunch. The seats on either side of them are, suspiciously, empty, so the closest people are the few heads in front or behind them.

Will raises a brow at Hannibal but is dismissed by a small grin. Will rolls his eyes. He plops his head onto Hannibal's shoulder and whispers "So what's the show about?"

Hannibal's head tilts towards him slightly. " *L'elisir d'amore* is a romance, depicting the peasant Nemorino's attempts at seducing his love, Adina. She repeatedly rejects him so he tries once more with the help of a so-called love potion he bought from a scammer. Adina is proposed to by another man while Nemorino plays aloof, and because of his seeming change of heart, she accepts her suitor's proposal.

"Nemorino is devastated that the potion doesn't work and is convinced to join the army for the funds awarded to him for it. He uses the money to purchase a second love potion and marches into the square. Some gossiping women reveal that Nemorino has been named the sole heir to his recently-deceased uncle, something the man himself is unaware of.

"Adina is beside herself at his newfound popularity and finds out that he is still dedicated to her, despite his distanced behavior earlier. She offers to buy his military contact and free him from service, assuring that he need not join the military to be happy. This, of course, is based on Gaetano Donizetti's own experience. They embrace, and are caught by Adina's fiancé catches them, though he leaves them to their happiness."

A suspicious twinkle lights Hannibal's eye.

“Hannibal. Do you liken yourself to the well-meaning Nemorino?”

“Perhaps my endeavors were not as innocent as Nemorino’s, though I have managed to win the heart of my true love despite making a fool of myself in their eyes.”

Will snorts, intending to tell him off before the orchestra picks up, followed by the curtains sliding open as the show starts. He settles for pinching Hannibal’s side, enjoying his subtle flinch before redirecting his full attention to the show.

The first act is shockingly entertaining. Will had only managed to sneak into a handful of school fine arts performances in high school and since then he hasn’t set foot in a theater for anything besides a movie.

They spend intermission flitting from conversation to conversation, Will only jumping in to add something now and again. He’s oddly excited for the second act. He nurses a fine glass of whiskey until the lights flicker and the beeps cut through their discussions once more.

The second act is just as good as the first. *Una Furtiva Lacrima* has tears filling Will’s eyes, though he blinks them away to see the performance. It’s the most fun Will’s had in a while.

After they depart, he convinces Hannibal to stay with him. They let the dogs out, have a late dinner, then curl up by the fire, reading side-by-side for a while.

“Do you see the stream every night?” Will asks out of the blue.

Hannibal peers at him over his book curiously. “Yes, since we killed Randall together. I assume it has something to do with the new level of intimacy we reached that night.”

“Do you think soulmates exist?”

“Not in the typical definition of the word, though I think that there being connections that are more fully developed and revealing than the kinds that tend to form is not only possible but something we likely experience ourselves. We know each other in a way not many get close to, that I know for sure.”

“How would we be soulmates exactly, if we were defining our relationship in that way?”

“I imagine it’s because you see me more fully than anyone else in my life ever has, and you accept me and love me for it, not despite it. I might even have been holding us back if I am completely honest. Until that night where we defeated Tier side by side, I had lingering fears that this, us, had an expiration date. That, inevitably, you would grow tired of me, or worse, the morals you had clung to would overwhelm you and you would turn me in. It terrified me that I would let you.

“I am no longer scared, and I do not worry. I love you, Will Graham, and that is more than enough to satisfy me.”

Will sets his book on the floor, dog-earing the corner to mark his page. He stands up and walks over to Hannibal, waiting until he turns fully to face him before crawling in his lap. He straddles him, arms looping around his shoulders, and presses their cheeks together.

“The first time Bev visited me in the BSHCI, I had been locked up for three days. She was the first person to visit me, and the person I least expected to. I was disappointed when she wanted to talk about you, about the *Ripper,* but not surprised. She asked me what you do with the organs. I figured it out then, that you eat them. That you’d been feeding us them. That night, I went to bed and I opened my eyes to find myself in some fancy, European chapel. There’s a mural of a skeleton with its hands clasped in prayer embedded in the floor. I’ve spent every night there until we killed Tier together.”

Hannibal stiffens under him. Will’s fingers tangle in the soft material of his sweater and he relaxes minutely.

“I was *so afraid* that what I was experiencing was another symptom of encephalitis, that I hadn’t recovered fully. Or that I had made it all up, that everything I learned about you was a lie. And then, in the car, you mentioned my stream and I…”

“What are you saying, Will?” Hannibal’s voice is distant like he’s speaking from the other side of the house.

“I’m saying that for the past seven months, I’ve had unrestricted access to your mind palace. I know you better than anyone. And now, you can know me like that. You’re mine, Hannibal. Forever and always.”

“Did you know of Abigail?”

“Yeah, I did.” Will sighs heavily. “I helped her get Miriam and flee. She isn’t ours, not really. You don’t need her to tie me to you, and I don’t need any family besides you. I hope that she keeps in touch, but I don’t want to see her as Garret Jacob Hobbs did; she isn’t a tool or a need, she’s a person. And I’m willing to let her go. I can’t lose you, Hannibal. Don’t go away, I can feel you retreating.”

Hannibal’s hands reach up, trembling, and clutch at his nightshirt. “This is big, Will. You were mad about Abigail, I don’t know if I can move on from this immediately.”

“You don’t have to. Just don’t act rashly. I wish I had done enough to reassure you of your doubts earlier on; I knew about how Murasaki hurt you and I didn’t do anything to prove myself different. Hell, I spent months furious at you, trying to find a way to hurt you through your mind palace. That was wrong of me.” Will slides a hand up into Hannibal’s hair to grip it possessively, something he knows is a comfort to Hannibal.

It seems to work, as the body in his arms slumps into him, clutching him closer.

“I won’t hide from you any longer, alright? You can have full access to my stream, my thoughts, all of it. I won’t take that from you. I don’t want to. And if you want, I’ll never make my way through the halls of your mind palace again. I swear of it.”

Hot tears begin to pool into his clavicle, where Hannibal presses his face in harder. “You were the one I spoke to those few times? In my sleep when I found you?”

“Twice, yes. I wanted to see if there was any hope that you could reciprocate my experiences.”

“Can you visit outside of sleep as I can?”

Will huffs a wet laugh. “Yeah, yeah I figured that out accidentally. I’ve been doing that recently after I stopped appearing there at night.”

“Is what you said in the car true? You missed me?”

Will hums a yes.

“I think I would like to sleep now. I need time to process this.”

“Of course.” Will pulls back, helping Hannibal to his feet as well. “Do you still want to stay?”

Hannibal’s face is red, eyes puffy and still threatening to overflow with tears. He pouts, thin lips pressing together. “I said I needed time to think, not a divorce.”

Will’s eyebrows raise and he barks out a shocked laugh. “C’mon then, I’ll hold you.”

“You’d better. I think I deserve it, after the night you’ve put me through.”

Chapter End Notes

I listened to bits and pieces of L'elisir d'amore, it looks like one I'd want to watch live. I based Will's opinions on that since I'm picky
Stay safe, see you next week!

There is Only Surrender

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal make some discoveries. A reveal looms on the horizon.

Chapter Notes

This week's chapter title is from OTGW again! A little warning for this chapter: there are vague discussions of injury to animals that come with the Clark Ingram case.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

FBI PROFILER SLEEPING WITH SHRINK? Baltimore's Finest raising ethical concerns amid dropped murder charges.

The headline assaults him from Bev's screen the moment he turns around. He was perfectly content to spend his time staring at crime scene photos in Jack's office while the man himself got a refill on coffee before Bev inserted herself into his space and shoved her phone under his nose.

"Hell," he groans.

"No kidding. I mean, is she stalking you? Maybe you should get a restraining order. This feels like something you could sue her for, defamation or some shit. I'd love to see her grovel to try and get out of a lawsuit."

Bev's thumb slides up to reveal a photo of Will clinging onto Hannibal's arm. From the angle, the way Hannibal's arm rests possessively on his lower back, and the way Will's head is tilted back to gaze at Hannibal's face, Will looks like a trophy wife. Not an idea he's at all upset about appearing as, but the way Lounds seems to use it to attack Hannibal now makes his blood boil.

Tragic that he would likely be suspect number one if she… disappeared.

"Now that Abigail's gone, she's moved on to slandering another person I care about. Fucking Freddie." He slips Bev's phone from her loose grasp and starts reading the rest of the article. It suggests that Will is either threatening Hannibal or has charmed the man with his serial killer charisma. That Hannibal needs to be scrutinized by the Board for ethics violations to free him from Will's violent influence.

One particular section makes him want to wrap his hands around her throat and dig his nails in, ripping her apart slowly.

Will Graham's charges were dropped, the families of these victims still waiting for justice. I urge you, dear readers, to remember that Graham is so messed up that he believed himself capable of someone else's crimes, even if he was unconscious when committing them.

But Will Graham is volatile, a landmine waiting for the right pressure to set him off, and we should be so lucky to see him back in the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane soon because that's exactly where he belongs. Dr. Hannibal Lecter has been compromised by Will Graham, ruined by him, as Will Graham destroys everything he touches. For now, his plans are uncertain, but I will get to the bottom of this ASAP.

"Enough of Lounds, gimme my phone back. Did you hear that Randall Tier's disappeared, along with the cave bear skeleton he was cleaning? Suspicious, right?" Bev wrangles the phone from his grasp and he scowls.

"Any trace of him?"

"Nope. Security cameras trace his route home before he takes a back road somewhere. That's the last anyone's seen of him. Think another body'll drop soon?"

Will isolates Tier's kills from the mixed piles of crime scene photos. Each body is scattered, bits and pieces of the three of them strewn about the bloody snow. Will hardly remembers what Tier's blood looked like on the wood panels of his floor.

“I get the feeling he’s not going to be found this time.”

~

Freddie’s car is outside of his house when he approaches. When he reaches the peak of the hill a bit down his driveway, he sees it sitting there, its owner nowhere in sight. He parks there, hoping he’s far enough that the slow trundle of his car hadn’t been noticed.

The wind muffles the way his footsteps crunch the snow beneath him. The door of his barn has been hastily closed and the lock lays in the snow to the side of the door.

He swings the door open slowly, tucking himself into the building as soon as the gap in the door is wide enough to fit. Freddie is hunched over his icebox, rooting around in his frozen fish stores. She won’t find anything; Hannibal took the rest of Tier to his house to freeze or dispose of.

“You don’t know what you’re doing, Freddie,” he says when he’s within a few yards of her.

She whips around, eyes wide and red hair flying around her. She clutches her arms to her chest like a kid caught with her hand in the cookie jar. A second of hesitation before she’s pulling a revolver from her handbag and aiming it at his head.

He raises his hands slowly, not wanting to startle her. “Don’t do that, Freddie. You broke in and I’m unarmed. How do you think this is gonna look when they find me?”

Her hand wavers before she rolls her shoulders back and sets her feet shoulder-width apart. “Why should I trust you? What do you want from me?”

Will raises an eyebrow. “You can’t think of one thing?” He sighs. “Freddie, I want you to take back what you said about Hannibal. I don’t care what you say about me anymore, but

don’t drag him into this. You’ve made a significant profit slandering me but you’re not allowed to ruin his reputation. You can release a public retraction or we can use you. For libel and B&E.”

Her brow furrows. Will groans internally, frustrated that she won’t let him put his arms down. “You still haven’t given me a single reason why I should believe that you won’t kill me the moment I put my gun down.”

“Is your phone on?”

“Yes.”

“Then the nearest cell tower can prove your proximity to *my* house. You may think I’m crazy, but do you genuinely believe I’m that stupid? I’d never get away with it.”

She stands unmoving for another moment before sighing and tucking her gun away. “Not suing me won’t be enough. I want something more substantial. I can brush off a lawsuit easily.”

Will nods. He buries his hands in his jacket pockets, fingers numb from the cold. “I’d expect nothing less, from you. C’mon, it’s cold. I can make coffee inside.”

Freddie hesitantly follows him inside. She pointedly keeps her bag close by at all times. Will gestures to the dining room table while he heads into the kitchen to try and figure out how to work the coffee machine Hannibal left behind recently when he got sick of Will’s own, mediocre coffee.

The setup is similar to the night Margot visited but so jarringly different that the comparison is laughable. Both women want something from him, but Freddie’s reasoning for being here is a lot less reasonable than Margot’s.

“I won’t lie and say that my and Hannibal’s relationship isn’t unusual at best and pushing ethical boundaries at worst, but it’s nothing incriminating. He’s not perfect, and if he were following procedure he would’ve rejected me a long time ago, but it’s been a while since I was officially his patient and nothing explicitly unethical occurred during that time.”

“Fascinating,” Freddie drawls, leaning over the table to take the mug of coffee that he hands to her.

Will flops into the chair across from him, sipping his coffee and enjoying its warmth. “I’ll give you exclusive insights into the Ripper case.”

“Now that’s what I’m talking about, Mr. Graham.” Her blue eyes burn with hunger, a lust for knowledge that knows no bounds. “You have something to start us off?”

Will nods. “Miriam Lass escaped. We don’t know where she is, but the Ripper planned on revealing her existence but someone found her and helped her escape before we found her.”

“Holy shit. Do you have any clue where she went?”

Will tuts condescendingly. “One piece of information at a time, Freddie. If I give you too much it’ll be too obvious who told you and I can’t show the FBI’s hand so soon. Not when we know the Ripper reads your articles. I’ll call you before the end of the month, give you more then.”

She stares intently at him for a moment, then blinks, settling in her seat. “Alright, I can make do with that. But! I don’t get a call and I’m publishing another article on your boyfriend. Something is off about him, I’ll find out what.”

Will huffs a laugh, running a hand through his hair. “You’re a bloodhound, Freddie, but this time you’ve got the wrong scent. The Ripper’s meddling, don’t trust everything you hear.”

~

Will grins as he flips his phone around to show Freddie's newest article to Hannibal.

"Miss Lounds has changed her tune? How did you manage that, beloved?"

"Oh, I've been told I'm very persuasive," Will purrs, perching on the desk in Hannibal's study. He takes the glass of wine Hannibal offers him, lifting it to rest the glass on his lip without taking a sip. "She broke into my shed and I threatened to sue. And I might've… 'accidentally' let it slip that Miriam Lass is alive."

Hannibal chuckles at him, settling in his usual seat by the fire. The light makes his eyes glow gold, accentuated by the swirling yellow paisley of his tie. "She's found a loose thread and won't stop tugging, even after it unravels the world around her."

A pause, then he mumbles, "Would now be a good time to mention it?"

Will glances up from his wine glass. "Mention what?"

Hannibal gives him a confused look.

"You said 'would now be a good time to mention it?' Mention what?"

"I hadn't thought I had spoken aloud. Jack called me in to look at a crime scene on Sunday. He said that you had mentioned that you don't want to be called in on weekends and I was already in Baltimore. A woman was found in the uterus of a horse."

"We always get the weird ones, don't we? Was she dead before she went in the horse?"

"Yes. It appears that she was strangled, though I assume we'll find out the official cause of death when Jack calls you into the lab next. The stitches were neat; this is someone with some form of medical expertise, though I'm leaning towards veterinary skills or training."

Will sips the last of his wine, setting it on the desk behind him. He still has to drive home tonight so this was his only glass. “Sounds interesting. Will you continue to help profile or was this just because of availability?”

“I suppose we’ll have to wait and see. Have you heard from Abigail recently?”

Will makes his way over to the loveseat by the fire, patting the cushion next to him. Hannibal stands gracefully and snuggles into his side. “Not since the last email. They’re getting Miriam used to speaking for long periods, acclimating her to being around strangers a little more before they call Freddie.”

“Mhm. Do let her know that I wish her the best, will you?”

“I think I can manage that,” Will agrees, pulling Hannibal’s arms around him.

They sit in silence for a while, Will watching the way the fire cracks and shifts as Hannibal listens to his heartbeat. Soon, Will begins to suspect that Hannibal has fallen asleep on him, his breathing slow and regular. He risks a glance at him.

His eyelashes glow golden in the light, the shadows on his face undulating with the fire’s movements. He’s asleep.

Hannibal snuffles a bit as Will shifts and he freezes immediately. Soon after, Hannibal stops moving as well and Will breathes a silent sigh of relief. He sits there in silence until Hannibal’s eyes move rapidly behind his eyelids in deep sleep.

Will finally slips from under Hannibal, popping his joints and allowing the blood to flow through his arm where Hannibal’s steady weight had cut off the circulation. He doesn’t think he can pick Hannibal up since he’s broader and more muscular, but he can rearrange him into a comfortable reclined position on the couch and toss a blanket over his shoulders. He kills the fire and leaves a note for Hannibal on his desk, letting him know he had to leave but didn’t want to wake him up.

He’s exhausted when he falls asleep, yearning for the comfort of Hannibal’s mind palace.

He blinks to alertness in the familiar chapel. Will’s cheeks hurt from the smile that overtakes him.

“Will,” a familiar, pleased voice chimes from behind him. He swivels around to see Hannibal.

“I thought I’d never be back here accidentally. It’s nice to be able to get a full night’s sleep while being here.”

Hannibal smiles, his eyes crinkling. He’s dressed in the same suit from this evening, solid red with a paisley gold tie. “I was experimenting. You suggested that you found it comforting here, I tried summoning you. Did you just fall asleep?”

Will nods, walking down from the front of the room to the closest row of pews. They’re wooden and uncomfortable, and the dull ache that quickly blossoms in his tailbone reminds him of the time he spent sitting through sermons with the lady down the street who babysat him for the three months he lived in Baton Rouge when he was 7.

Hannibal sits beside him, lacing their fingers together in the space between them. “I… suspect this bond between us is deeper even than you know. I know of two instances recently where you have seemingly read my thoughts.”

Will’s head whips over to stare at him unbelievingly. “Are you shitting me?”

Hannibal scowls at him.

“Hannibal, don’t give me that look! You just told me I can read your goddamn mind and you’re gonna give me shit for cursing a little?”

His scowl wobbles before it's overcome with a bemused grin. "Is this really such a surprise? You've had months to come to terms with the odd complexity of our bond, but I've had but a handful of days to try and understand all of it, then I find out it's even more vast than I was led to believe."

"I'd been led to believe that my nightly wanderings in here were as far as it was going to go, I'm just as surprised by every advancement as you. Is that why you've been experimenting? You want to see if your abilities are as involved as my own?"

Hannibal's head dips in a nod. "I know that I can at least control your appearance here if I am here, asleep, before you. Perhaps it's even more than that, I am expectantly hopeful to find out."

Me too, Will thinks. *Me too.*

Hannibal's hand grips his chin, angling his face towards him. Brown eyes flicker up and down his face, taking him in, looking for… something.

"Did you speak? Just now?"

"Nope. You heard me?"

"Yes," Hannibal murmurs breathlessly. His thumb strokes soothing motions back and forth across Will's jaw. "You never cease to amaze me, mylimasis."

"Hey, is it impressive that I can read your mind or that I can project my thoughts into your head? It's one or the other, you've got to be doing something too." Will can't help but grin.

"Why not both? You were the one to open up this link between us in the first place. I cannot help but admire you for it."

Will sighs dramatically, flopping sideways onto Hannibal's lap before sprawling out to get more comfortable. "Then I guess I'll have to do the same for you."

Hannibal squints down at him, once again reminding Will of a pleased cat. Will imagines him bathing himself like a cat, daintily smoothing his fringe back into place with the back of his hand.

Hannibal scowls at him and he knows he's seeing what Will is. "You tease, but I recall you being the one to luxuriate in the baths I prepared for you on several occasions. And you're just as finicky as a cat and slow to acclimate to others."

Will shrugs awkwardly from his reclined position. "I like you taking care of me, is that a crime?"

"Never, beloved. Never will I live to see the day where I will not do everything in my power to make sure you are clean, healthy, and full."

Will shudders, feeling cold suddenly, and it takes him a moment to realize the memory-sensation is Hannibal's, bleeding through their bond. He buries his face in Hannibal's stomach and tangles his fingers into his suit jacket. Appreciation tinted with sorrow whispers through him and he knows Hannibal is their origin.

~

He wakes up to the final trill of his basic ringtone and seven other voicemails. There are twice as many missed calls, all from the same number. He sighs when the same number pops up once again.

"Will Graham," he grunts.

"I'm well aware. Crawford gave me your number, I didn't think I'd have to call but the article Freddie Lounds released is horrific!" Frederick Chilton's distraught voice squawks at him.

“I don’t control what Lounds writes. I think you’d have figured that out earlier, but here we are. It didn’t even explicitly state that you’re the Ripper, just that you’re a suspect and are known for medical malpractice. Both of which, if you recall, are facts. You have no basis to claim defamation.”

“But-but! If the public is led to doubt my innocence, Hannibal’s chances of-”

“He’s not getting free. The evidence I’ll get will be incontestable. The only thing a trial will do is figure out how many life sentences the man will get.”

Will grabs his laptop from the coffee table, settling it in his lap as he sits cross-legged in the bed. As it whirrs to life, he considers his options.

“This has to go perfectly or else we’ll be in his crosshairs,” Chilton says. “He’s already gotten you once, he won’t hesitate to retaliate if we get caught.”

He’s terrified. Will gets it. If he were a little less like Hannibal, he would’ve been scared shitless when he found out Hannibal was the Ripper. Normal people fear for their lives; people like Will and Hannibal get angry at the betrayal, the secrets. Will understands that he’s afraid, and why, but he decided to stop caring too long ago for Chilton to have any real allies here.

“He’s blind right now, and we need to keep him blind. If he invites you to dinner, don’t act like you’re working against him. You’re still colleagues and if you act suspiciously that’ll send him on high alert faster than anything. Just be glad you can’t eat meat anymore.”

Chilton lets out a little sound in his throat, sort of a whine, sort of an affronted huff. Will hangs up on him before he can say anything else.

The first thing he does when his laptop loads is check his personal email. There, a single new email from ‘Alice Parker’ waits for him. He suggested that Abigail switch names another time after Alice, but she’s at least kept the email.

Hey Will!

I n Miriam will contact F at noon tomorrow, Baltimore time. Miriam's decided to leave me out of it, she thinks it's safer all around if everyone thinks I'm gone. How's it going with H? After the meeting, maybe I'll call you. Is your # still the same?

Love, Alice

He's pleased that Miriam seems to be looking out for Abigail too. She needs more genuine allies. He writes her back, letting her know that everything's ready on his end. Then, he shoots a text to Hannibal.

Invite Chilton to dinner 2night? It's happening tomorrow.

Hannibal responds quickly, which startles Will when he goes to set his phone down and it chirps loudly at him. *Of course. Will you be joining us?*

Nope. Meddling, sorry.

Enjoy yourself then. I must go, I have an appointment soon.

Will thanks him and then gets ready for work. It's nearly time for him to leave already so he rushes through breakfast, knowing Hannibal would bitch about his eating habits if he could see how Will leans over the sink with half a bagel smothered in cream cheese.

Will still doesn't have any classes but Jack's been anxious to pull him onto a new case, likely the one Hannibal told him about last night.

Will's suspicions are quickly confirmed when Jack displays a series of photos on his desk for Will to look at. A woman, completely naked and with severe bruising around her throat, lays beside the cut-open stomach of a horse, drenched in coagulated blood.

Will takes in the careful stitching done on the horse and how drastically different it feels from the bruising on the victim's neck. It's such a change in temperament that he has to physically shake the disorienting thoughts off.

"Did the killer kill the horse too?" Will glances up at Jack.

Jack shakes his head. "Vet says her foal died, she had stopped eating. She was going to die anyway, at most he helped her along."

Will frowns at that. "A mercy kill. Why would he be so gentle with the horse and not the woman, except for when he put her in the horse?"

"Cared for animals, but maybe he was misogynistic. It happens."

"No, no I think it's something different. He knew the horse and probably knew her too. You said she worked there? Maybe her killer did too or still does. You got a list of current and past employees that worked with the horses?"

Jack nods. The two of them shuffle through papers, looking at names and addresses until Will pauses. "Peter Bernadone. He lives nearby. Have you interviewed him yet?"

"No, I was hoping to get you on the case first. Price and Zeller are going to autopsy her; why don't we swing by for that and then we interview him?"

Will swings his arm out in an 'after you' gesture.

Chapter End Notes

I told you I'd be early! Next week I'll be back to frantically trying my best to upload on Friday. Stay safe!

Straight Jacket and Tie, Psychiatric Supply

Chapter Summary

Epilogue: Will has a swell time. Featuring: Bev and Molly, and Miriam and Abigail. Also (unfortunately) featuring a special appearance from Mason Verger

Chapter Notes

This week's chapter title is from Outliers and Hyppocrates: a fun fact about apples by Will Wood.
Minor warning for everything associated with Mason Verger: vague mentions of pedophilia, animal abuse, incest, the works
We've got one final big boy of a chapter, a large man if you will, to bid this arc an official farewell! More info on the inevitable sequel in the end notes :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s embarrassingly easy to break into Frederick Chilton’s house when he’s not home and deposit an unexpected visitor into his basement. The man he’s assigned to be the Chesapeake Ripper’s final victim is some asshole mechanic who tends to overcharge and underperform, someone who earned Hannibal’s ire half a decade ago and has been on borrowed time ever since.

During their lunch break, Hannibal had cradled Will in his arms as he whispered instructions on how to keep him sedated until the FBI investigated Chilton’s house. Will, despite being painfully distracted by Hannibal’s wandering fingers tracing mindless patterns up and down his sides, dutifully committed each statement to memory.

He stands now, in a back room in the basement that Chilton seems to forget exists by the accumulation of dust on every scant item in the room. Will feels a little silly in the clear murder suit Hannibal gave him, and he hates to admit it but it’s incredibly effective at keeping blood stains off of his person.

He hefts their victim onto the medical table he's brought with him and quickly reinserts the IV into the crook of his elbow. There's just enough fluid to last the night and into the early morning hours when Will knows Chilton will have already departed from work.

The man is missing both his legs, cut off from the mid-thigh. He won't be going anywhere, even if he wakes long before the police arrive. Hannibal kept one of the thigh pieces—it'll be their celebration dinner—and the other leg has been sorted into freezer-safe gallon bags, the same brand that Chilton's other frozen goods have been stored in.

Will makes quick work of hiding the new meat in Chilton's freezer before he redirects his attention to sneaking back out. Thankfully, it's a weeknight and all four of Chilton's neighbors have settled down for dinner or sleep as the cold darkness weighs heavily upon the night like a blanket. Will walks about a mile to the corner shop on the main road where his car is parked in the blind spot between old security cameras.

He's home before Hannibal even sends him a text letting him know that his dinner with Chilton is coming to a close. He checks his email, finds a blank email from Abigail with a thumbs-up emoji as the subject line, and breathes a sigh of relief as he fixes the dogs' dinners.

Will flops onto his bed with a tupperware filled with leftovers as he watches his pack. Their snuffling and happy dining lead his wandering thoughts to the interview he had conducted with Jack earlier that day.

Peter Bernadone is, very obviously, innocent. Jack was just as certain of it as Will. It was one thing to look at a crime scene photo of how carefully the horse had been stitched up, it was another to see firsthand just how much Peter cared for his animals. When much of the world turned its back on Peter after his accident, he found comfort in caring for the horde of animals that made their way to his barn.

Peter just needed someone to understand him, help him when he struggled with communicating his needs, and support his goals. His social worker, the one Peter hinted at having been the real killer, failed him in this.

Will can easily see a world in which he struggled harder against his bond with Hannibal, where Hannibal kept experimenting with him and keeping him at arms' length as Will

simultaneously embraced and rejected their connection and his desires.

He imagines that, in this world, he would project his misguided desire to make himself Hannibal's victim onto Peter. He would hate Clark Ingram not for failing a good man but for reminding him of how Hannibal betrayed him.

He wonders if, in that world, his emotions would betray him and for once he would lose track of his goals, allowing Ingram to slip from his grasp. He doesn't have to worry about that now. Even if Jack's team fails to bring him down, Will won't let Ingram punish Peter for his own crimes. Though his blood sings for violence, *justice,* he forces himself to prioritize Peter's safety over anything else.

He knows that taking Ingram down won't feel as victorious if Ingram wins the first battle. So, he waits.

Instead, he goes to bed. He searches for Hannibal in their chapel though he doesn't see any sign of him anywhere. It's odd; they've met here every night since Will opened up to him about the connection.

Will forces himself awake, grunting as a wave of exhaustion washes over him. He honestly hates doing this, but knowing that he can just pop out of his dreams is a relief after being trapped in a nonstop barrage of the worst nightmares his fevered brain could come up with for months.

He shoots Hannibal a text asking if he's up, but nothing comes of it. He sits in silence for ten minutes before he gives up. He flops back into bed with a huff, scowling his way back into sleep to give Hannibal a piece of his mind.

He ends up waiting in the chapel for what he estimates to be half an hour before he settles for relaxing in his stream.

Will blinks and he's knee-deep in his stream, nice button-up and slacks replaced with an old shirt and jeans tucked under his waders. His hands settle into the familiar grip around his

fishing rod and he glances around his surroundings to get a feel for what fish he might find. After all, what's the fun in imagining going fishing if it doesn't resemble real life?

He pauses when his eyes land on a familiar figure lounging on his side on a blanket on the riverbank. Hannibal lounges in a loose, tan cotton shirt, unbuttoned at the collar. Hannibal's collarbones on display, Will struggles to make a sound to alert him to his sudden appearance.

"Uh-" he chokes out.

Hannibal's gaze flickers up from his book and back down before he blinks twice. His book slips from his grasp as he sits up fully, grinning openly. "Will, you're here."

"Of course I am! You ditched me." Will lets his irritation seep into his tone, though he worries that his usual 'sassy brow' as Bev calls it is undermined by his pout.

It seems to work fine enough, as Hannibal frowns and pushes himself up to his feet. "I apologize, I hadn't meant to stay too long. It's incredibly peaceful here, in your stream. I'm submerged in your calming presence."

"I have a calming presence?"

Hannibal slips his shoes and socks off, stepping forward to stand ankle-deep in the stream. "It may be difficult to believe, but I've always found your presence to be soothing. I find security in your level-headed decisiveness, even if it ends with me fumbling to catch up."

Will huffs a laugh. "You're insane."

"My dear, I think we both know I am painfully aware of my unwavering sanity. Now help me summon a set of waders so you can show me the ropes."

“I think I can do that. Make yourself some rubber boots while I get this. By the way, you’re making dinner for Bev and her girlfriend in two days. We’ve got a double date and I’ve got to impress Molly so we don’t scare her away from Bev before her personality can do that for her.”

Will wakes up to a flood of texts from his coworkers. A glance reveals that they’re all about Miriam’s interview with Lounds and the panic that followed. The reactions ranged from Bev’s shocked excitement—and key smashes showing how amazed she is that Miriam survived all this time—to Price’s genuine concern for how this might affect Jack. Almost suspiciously, none have come in from Jack yet.

Will responds to Bev quickly before he looks up the actual interview. He wants to see exactly what has been revealed so he knows what he can and can’t say during the proceeding investigation.

Lounds’ website is just as garishly designed as he remembers, with cartoonish blood splatter surrounding the body of the text that accompanies the video and multiple popups directing to her merch shop harassing him at every step of the way. There *is* a transcript available for the video, which is almost shocking until he considers the extra traffic her site might garner with it. Freddie Lounds never was the altruistic type, though she’s also not the worst journalist he knows of, even if she is the one he despises most openly.

The video starts with a black screen. A chibi drawing of Freddie pops up on the screen with a microphone in one hand. A speech bubble pops up, reading “Stay tuned for an online exclusive interview with the only survivor of Baltimore’s very own Chesapeake Ripper!”

The image soon fades to black, replaced quickly by what is a recording of a Zoom call. Freddie sits, back rigid, clad in her typical bright colors and eye-catching obnoxious style, in a close-up that focuses on her face. Miriam Lass sits a little farther back from her camera, visible from the waist up as she hunches over in an office chair in a failed attempt at looking calmer than she is. She’s dressed in what looks to be a pantsuit, with her hair tied up in a lazy braid that drapes over her left shoulder.

Freddie grins at the camera. “Hello everybody, I’d like to introduce someone that you might all be aware of already: Miriam Lass, the supposed final victim of the Ripper’s most recent

killing spree. Miriam, you went missing almost three years ago, how much of that time do you remember?"

Miriam grimaces, though it looks like she intended it to be a smile by the way her nose crinkles artificially. "Not much, if I'm honest. I was kept unconscious for much of it, though I have flashes of memories that I've been regaining. The occasional dinner in a house I can't recall, a man's voice. The thing I remember most is the light."

"And what happened with that?"

"He would… induce a sort of hypnotic trance, I suppose is the best way to explain it. The light would fill my vision and his voice would be all I could focus on. I never saw him. Or, if I did, I can't remember what he looked like. I would recognize his voice anywhere, though."

Freddie leans forward at that, her hand coming up so she can rest her head on it. "Oh? And did you know him before you were captured?"

"No. He was unfamiliar to me. I remember… coming to a realization about who could be a possible suspect, but I spent too long with him making sure I forgot for me to be able to explain it. All I know is that there was one, and I found him. And he must've seen me as too much of a potential threat to let me go.

"He admired my strength," she grimaces, eyes darting back and forth as she focuses on something behind the camera. She tracks an unknown movement for a second before refocusing.

"And that's why he didn't kill you?"

"I believe so. I was intelligent enough to find him, though not smart enough to leave well enough alone. He took my arm," she adds and wiggles her left arm so her sleeve slides down to reveal where the plastic covering ends just below her elbow.

“One day, I was awoken and he told me what he was going to do and how he’d do it. Then, he put me under again. The interaction was perturbingly polite, if not for the subject matter. I never felt scared, even when I woke up next to find what was left of my arm wrapped in bandages, though I don’t know how much of that was due to the drugs he pumped me with.”

Freddie’s head tilts to the side, and Will imagines her as a curious child holding a magnifying glass up at just the right angle to set an ant on fire. “Would you recognize him now?”

“I’d know his voice anywhere. And, I had help figuring out who—and where—I was when I first came to in the cabin I was supposed to be found in.”

Her camera shifts backward to reveal a full-body view of Miriam, as well as an empty chair set beside hers. Once the camera settles, a second person walks on-screen.

Abigail’s hair has grown out a bit since the last time he’s seen her, Will thinks. The dark strands settle on her shoulders more solidly now. She wears a loose brown sweater and blue jeans with rips at the knee. A flower clip holds her hair back to reveal the scar where her ear used to be.

She sits tensely, lifting a hand in a wave. Her lips press together in a polite smile.

“Holy shit,” Freddie gapes. “You’re not dead.”

Abigail grimaces. “Yeah, I didn’t have a choice in the matter. He’s good like that though; he presents his plans in a way that makes it feel like it’s you making the decision, or that your best option is to follow him. That he has everyone’s best interests in mind. But he doesn’t, just his own amusement.”

“And you know who the Ripper is?”

“Yeah, I-i do.” Abigail turns away from the camera for a moment, wrapping her arms around herself. Will can just see tears welling up in her eyes, though she blinks them away when Miriam lays a comforting hand on her shoulder. “Frederick Chilton tricked me into helping

him frame Will Graham and he was intending to do the same to Hannibal Lecter before I helped Miriam escape."

Freddie's eyes narrow. "Why did he want to Frame Lecter?" She's so intently focused on the pair that Will is certain that she hasn't blinked since Abigail showed up.

"He never said explicitly why but I think it's because he's generally more well-received by their colleagues and by high society as a whole. Hannibal has everything that Chilton pretends to: money, friends, a successful career. And he wanted to see how he would react if it all got torn down around him if he would crumble under the pressure. Will was easier, after all, everyone thought he was crazy to begin with. But Doctor Lecter would be a shock. His reputation would be in shambles."

"The Ripper views everyone around him as lesser than, especially his victims," Miriam chimes in. "He elevates them to something greater than they are by killing them. Hannibal Lecter never personally earned his ire, and despite being a serial killer, the Ripper has a code he follows. It would be distasteful to him to break it. Lecter's only crime is that others see him as superior to the rest of us, so the Ripper knew that the best way to stop that was by framing him."

"That's very petty. 'A punishment that fits the crime' sort of thing. Why were you captured the way you were while Abigail Hobbs was stuck as his accomplice of sorts?"

"I had more use to him conscious. He thought he could make me into a killer like him, a protege of sorts. I tricked him into thinking it was working."

Freddie squints at her, brows furrowing as she considers her cover story. "And how did Frederick Chilton commit the Copycat Killer crimes?"

"Abigail and I have discussed in length the possibilities. She hadn't been aware of who he was at the time, but we've considered the possibility that he has connections, people willing to kill for money, or just for the thrill of it. He could have traveled there himself, but I don't know whether there's a record of his location at the times of death.

“That job has to be up to the FBI. We’re both more than willing to cooperate with the police for the investigation but we won’t be returning to Baltimore,” Miriam adds, mindlessly rubbing at the seam where her flesh tucked into the socket of her prosthetic. She stops, tucking her fingers into the crumpled pile of cloth where her sleeve is bunched up.

“Neither of us knows if we’ll ever be safe there; I know I won’t be going back for an interview so soon after… all this.” Abigail’s gaze goes unfocused and Will knows immediately that she’s still worried that Hannibal will be upset by her betrayal, that he’ll come looking for one or the both of them. She clenches her jaw and redirects her attention to Miriam.

“I’m helping Miriam recover. I don’t know if anyone else could genuinely comprehend what either of us has been through besides us. I never had a roommate before, it’s kind of fun. For the first time, I feel like myself, like an adult.”

Had he been the Will of several months ago, he would’ve winced at the relief in her tone. Now, he’s happy for her and proud that she was willing to take the leap and do this for herself despite everything she’s dealt with. With possibly a thousand miles between them, he thinks this might be the closest he’s been to genuinely feeling like a supportive presence in her life.

The interview starts to wrap up by then, though the curious gleam in Freddie’s eye knows she’s figured something out. Knowing her, she’ll dig painfully until she gets whatever scrap of information she had been hoping to find, then she’ll publish an article that’s mostly conjecture and still somehow painfully close to the truth.

Abigail does a good job of hiding her nerves, but he soon gets an email from her asking to keep an eye on Freddie. He promises to do so and asks her to keep him updated on their wellbeing. She responds soon after with just a thumbs up.

Is dinner still on for tomorrow he texts Bev.

With this wild conversation topic Hell yeah nothings getting in my way from picking dr lecters brain abt this

He huffs out a laugh at her quick response. He can always trust Bev to be open about what she's thinking.

He's shocked that he's actually looking forward to it. This is the first time he's invested in a friendship in at least a decade, and he's got Hannibal now too. He sort of has a job and his dogs are safe, what more could a man ask for?

Well, Will thinks bitterly, *a way to get rid of Peter Bernadone's fucked up social worker would be nice.*

He hears the gravel of his driveway crunching under tires. The engine doesn't sound like Hannibal's car, and he can hear it at all so it can't be Alana. His first thought is Jack, but despite his rush to get Will to crime scenes, he's usually polite enough to call ahead to check if Will's home.

He slips on a worn pair of pajama pants in case it's a stranger. Shifting the blinds reveals a black limo with tinted windows. Definitely not anyone he knows then. He imagines not answering, laying back down, and pretending to be asleep until they leave.

A tall, man clad in a plain but well-made suit steps out of the driver's seat. He circles the car to open the door for another man, blond and average-looking, but wearing a long, knee-length coat with fur trim.

Will doesn't recognize either of them, but the air of supremacy wafting off of the blond like jello gives him a hint. Egotistical, unfathomably rich, attention-hungry, there's only one man of that variety that Will can think of that would drop by without notice. Knowing who it is doesn't make him feel any better about the unexpected visit.

He creeps slowly back to the bed, hoping to still carry out his goal of playing dead until they fuck off. Keeping his eyes on the door, he unlocks his phone from muscle memory and sends Hannibal a text.

MV @ house. Will call soon.

Just as he's carefully lowering himself onto the bed to keep the old mattress's creaking to a minimum, a knock on the door echoes through the room. The sound sends the dogs—what few of them had settled since the car stopped—into a frenzy again.

"Mr. Graham," Mason calls from the other side of the door. "It's not polite to leave a visitor waiting. Who knows what kind of trouble I could find myself in."

The lilt of his voice makes it obvious that it's a lure to get him to come outside—and completely genuine. With his kind of money, and for the reasons he's likely here for, he has the means and desire to ruin Will's life in an instant.

Will throws open the door before he registers the fact that he stood up. Mason's smarmy face grins back at him.

"I'd say it's a pleasure to meet you, but Papa always frowned upon lying. 'A real man is direct,' he'd say. I'd say he's right, false platitudes go nowhere in my kind of business."

"I didn't know kicking puppies and harassing children was a business," Will deadpans. "Get off my property."

Mason pouts. Will imagines slowly peeling off his face layer by layer to keep from lunging at him. "Oh, but you have such little respect for my property. I'm just reciprocating in kind. 'Do unto others' and all that."

"I haven't done anything to *your* property."

"You certain about that? Because I have it on good authority that my darling sister was here the night before she disappeared."

“What a woman does in her free time is up to her. I didn’t know she was missing. Are you sure she’s gone? I heard you got a big plot of land out there, can’t be too hard to get lost even if you know the layout.”

Mason turns a bright red. “I can give you the grand tour if you help me locate her. Papa let her have too much free time when we were kids, she’s picked up on so many bad habits.”

Will grips the door tighter, pulling it halfway shut to build distance between the two of them. “Like I said, I didn’t know she was missing. My condolences.” He slams the door in Mason’s face.

He waits, unmoving behind the door to listen to Mason’s lethargic retreat. He breathes a sigh of relief when he finally hears the car pull away after nearly 5 minutes of waiting.

He pulls his phone out and calls Hannibal.

He picks up right away. “Will, are you alright?”

“I’m a big boy, I can handle myself.”

“I know you can. I also know that Mason is an unusual opponent. He’s too pigheaded to bow down when facing a superior adversary.”

Will snorts, shuffling over to the kitchen for coffee. “Really, Hannibal? Terrible puns aside, I think it’d be best if we set up a few cameras around here. Nothing he could pay someone to hack into easily.”

“I think I can get something of the sort set up. I can kill two birds with one stone; we can get a leg up on Mason and I get to watch you go about your daily routines when I’m not with you.”

“You’re a freak, you know that?”

“You say that as though you wouldn’t jump at the opportunity to do the same to my home.” He sounds so fucking smug. Will tells him as much as he sifts through the drawers of his fridge looking for sandwich meat that hasn’t expired yet.

“I imagine that besides this little unexpected misadventure, we’ll continue as usual?”

“Full speed ahead,” Will agrees. “Didja see Freddie’s interview?”

“Yes. I’m quite proud of how well the two of them seem to have recovered after such unprecedented traumas.”

“They’re strong. And they’re staying the hell away from the Ripper. No better therapy, I’d say.” Will pops a slice of honey ham into his mouth, tilting the receiver away so it doesn’t pick up the sound of his snacking.

“What about you? Staying away from the Ripper?” Will can imagine Hannibal’s flirty grin with such accuracy it sends a wanting pang through his chest.

“I’ve never been more intimately involved with him, I think. Nothing better for me.” Will plucks another slice of ham from the container.

“Will, are you snacking while on the phone?”

He fumbles with the phone and his slice of ham plops on the ground pathetically. Buster lunges for it before Will can even get a solid grip on the phone again. “Uh, sorry, did you say something? I have to let the dogs out, bye!”

Hannibal begins to call his name before he hits the red end button. He eats another slice and then tears one into pieces to give to the dogs as a treat.

Since he had been released in the middle of the semester, Will hasn't started teaching again. There's a nonzero chance he can get his teaching position back for next semester, but it feels odd teaching future FBI agents when he's dating the Chesapeake Ripper. At any rate, he doesn't feel the need to prove his goodness to the universe to counteract his darker thoughts. So his days have been free.

He spends the time leading up to their dinner with Molly and Bev lounging around his house or Hannibal's; he spends a good deal of time snuggled up under Hannibal's warm blankets on his immensely comfortable bed.

He spends the night leading up to the dinner, piles all seven of his dogs into his car, and spends half an hour establishing what areas of Hannibal's house are off-limits to them. Winston finds a place to lay on the floor by Will's side of the bed, while Ellie sprawls across one of the lounge chairs. Buster tries to sit on the bench of Hannibal's harpsichord and Will has to let him run around with Zoe in the backyard for half an hour before he forgets the temptation to disobey Will's commands to get off.

By 2 pm the day of the dinner, Will stands side by side with Hannibal as he teaches him how to make a rack of lamb.

Cooking has somehow become a comfort, going through the motions to produce something he genuinely enjoys and gets to share with people he cares about. He blames Hannibal's influence. It's easier to keep his content but sly grin from making Will laugh as he chops vegetables.

The rest of dinner seems so unusually typical that Will begins to feel suspicious by the time preparations for the dessert are about to begin. Hannibal waves a hand over his shoulder when he heads toward the pantry once more.

Will follows him, wholly unsurprised when he reveals a secret door leading to a basement. It's filled with murder equipment, as all good murder-basements are: a bone-saw welded to a table, several massive industrial-sized freezers, and a couple of butcher's hooks hanging from the ceiling in the corner.

Hannibal rifles through one of the freezers and pulls out a femur, obviously human. He then slips on a face mask with a respirator and flicks on the bone saw. “I have a second mask if you’d prefer to keep today’s meal in your stomach and not your lungs.” He gestures to a second drawer beside the one he got his.

When Will’s mask is settled properly on his face, Hannibal carefully locates a spot about a third of the way down from the top of the femur and slices it. Then, he hands the longer piece to Will to hold and cuts the top off so he can easily slice the remaining middle section in half lengthwise.

He flicks the saw off and starts cleaning the area. Will takes the silent instruction and returns the mask before turning to tuck the rest of the bone into the freezer where it belongs.

Will is painfully curious as to how a bone can be used in dessert, especially with only 4 hours at best until their guests arrive. He follows Hannibal back to the kitchen, where he pulls out a large pot and covers the slices of bone in just enough water that they’re fully submerged.

They end up thawing in the water for about ten minutes until Hannibal has will scrape the marrow into a saucepan to stir while he redirects his attention to the lamb.

It takes a bit of blindly following Hannibal’s instructions before Will connects the dots and figures out that he’s making creme brulée, especially given his unfamiliarity with the process and the odd secret ingredient. It smells shockingly good, and Will has to restrain himself from dipping his pinky into the mixture as he pours it into the ramekins to pop into the oven beside the lamb shank still slow-roasting.

From there, Will is back on sides duty until he pops the ramekins in the fridge to wait. He still wants to eat them so he distracts himself by carefully using a paring knife to skin a pot of potatoes.

Another couple of hours of preparing pass in the blink of an eye. He’s filling a dressing bottle with whatever salad dressing Hannibal sets in front of him when the doorbell rings.

Hannibal glances at Will and quirks an eyebrow. Will nods and the two of them head toward the door as a unified front to greet their guests.

Bev stands behind an average-height blonde woman who Will can only assume is Molly based on the familiar, gentle hold she has on her gray cardigan-clad elbow. They make a contrasting sight, with Bev wearing blood-red leather pants and a long-sleeved black blouse with parallel ruffles that cascade down her front and Molly's pastel yellow shirt tucked under her cardigan with dark blue jeans tucked into well-kept but well-worn work boots.

Bev raises her eyebrows and glances between Will and Hannibal unbelievingly as Hannibal offers his typical polite greetings. It takes a second for him to catch her meaning but taking in Hannibal's attire—unusual for anyone who isn't Will—has him grinning. Will's gotten used to seeing Hannibal 'dressed down,' but the brown dress shirt and matching suit jacket and pants are out of character for someone like Bev, who only ever sees him dressed like he's going to the opera every day.

Will takes Molly's hand when she offers it to shake. "It's nice to finally meet you. Bev never shuts up about you, it's nice to put a face to the name."

Bev not-so-subtly elbows him as she slips past to find her place in the dining room, though Will's shocked bark of laughter draws more attention than the movement itself. Will sends a knowing look to Hannibal from behind Will's back before he can make any assumptions, though he doesn't genuinely believe that he would eat her for this.

Molly gushes about how Bev has gotten along with her son, Walter, as Hannibal excuses himself to grab the salad Will prepared. She talks about how Walter's taught Bev a few things, tricks about where the fish at the lake they frequent are known to gather and which bait to use.

Molly glances at her hands, folded in her lap. "He's been a little withdrawn since his dad died. He's so young still he hardly knows what death even is, but he's started to open up more since Bev's started visiting." She smiles thoughtfully at her partner across the table.

"Younger children perceive significant loss as just that, a loss. Someone is missing from their life and no matter how much they plead they don't come back. Luckily, Walter has a solid support system to keep reminding him that he has nothing to do with the absence. Children

are egocentric, in their minds the world revolves around them. This keeps them focused on survival, but it means that they struggle to disconnect themselves from the inciting action that caused such loss," Hannibal chimes in, arms loaded with their salads.

Will helps him pass the plates around and subtly taps the right fork for Bev and Molly to use.

Molly grins gratefully at him before turning her gaze to Hannibal. "You're very well-informed. Beverly mentioned you were a psychiatrist, you don't specialize in child psychology, do you?"

Hannibal settles at the head of the table. He smiles kindly at her as he shakes his head. Will can see how plastic his comforting persona is—he isn't actively upset by the conversation topic, nor has he been in a long time, he wouldn't have brought it up if he minded the questioning. The subtle tensing of his jaw solidifies the knowledge that despite this, he does hope the conversation doesn't linger long and that he doesn't receive much placating sorrow from his guests.

"I only dabbled in child psychology in my schooling, most of my experience is firsthand. I have not always been so lucky to know with certainty the security of my loved ones."

Molly's face goes slack and she opens her mouth to say something. Will quickly jumps in to avoid the typical 'I'm sorry for your loss's and 'that's horrible's he knows that Hannibal finds so painfully irritating. "I never have to worry about Hannibal half-assing meals."

Molly's lips press into a line and Will knows the sentiment is not one that she shares but Bev snorts.

"My dad grew up poor so he always gives us a hundred with every gift-giving holiday, whether or not we officially celebrate it. We all cope with our pasts differently, at least most of us turn to try to better the lives of those we care about. Fuck knows I've seen a lifetime's worth of hurting others."

Will nods, accidentally making eye contact with Molly as he stuffs his face with a cherry tomato. He shivers at her discomfort, the artificial sadness that threatens to have tears well in

his eyes. He gulps, nearly choking on the mouthful of salad as he blurts out “I made the salad.”

All eyes turn to him. “And the potatoes, they’re the side with the main course. And dessert. That’s still cooling, in the fridge. Hannibal’s been teaching me how to make the simpler stuff. I’ve been too worried about burning the house down by experimenting too much. I did that once when I was a kid. My dad-”

Will is cut off when Hannibal rests a hand on his shoulder. He blinks and all of a sudden he’s back in his own body, his own head. The desperate need to fill awkward silence vanishes, along with the horror at the topic of conversation. He keeps his eyes down, partly to avoid accidentally letting Molly’s normalness into his head and partly to avoid the odd look she’s likely to give him.

Bev, used to him sinking into the most gruesome minds they come across, grins from his periphery. “Never seen you do that with someone who wasn’t a serial killer. Or investigating one.”

“I’ve gotten used to the darkness, Molly’s kinder nature startled me a little.” Will shrugs, picking up a lettuce leaf between his fingers and squishing it to make sure it was adequately crunchy. He pops it in his mouth when he’s certain it meets his standards.

Hannibal meets Molly’s questioning gaze for Will. “Will has hyper empathy, he reads a person’s body language instantly and, more often than not, feels what they feel. He uses it alongside his understanding of criminal psychology to piece together the motives of the killers he catches. He’s the smartest man I know.”

Will steels himself and raises his gaze to focus on the top button of Molly’s cardigan. “He’s just a romantic, don’t listen to him. I can’t do long division to save my life.”

The conversation strays to safer topics from there as Will offers to plate the main course so Hannibal can continue discussing art history with Molly. She took a class in college, though she never pursued a degree for anything.

Will considers Molly, how she interacts with Bev, and their differences and similarities. She very obviously doesn't enjoy Will and Bev's shop talk, too gentle-hearted to grow used to the violence. Bev is just outdoorsy enough that the two of them likely have loads to bond over in that aspect, and Molly seems to be on par with Will's love of nature.

He imagines that if he had met her before Bev and if he were still clinging to the sense of duty he felt to Jack or the law or his cobbled-together morality that he'd settle into the role of partner with someone like her to surround himself with goodness in the way he submerges himself in the darkness of Hannibal's interests currently. He's glad he strayed from that path; he'd only suffer silently in the ill-fitting person suit and he could never really love someone like that, no matter how desperately he tried.

He reassures himself by kissing Hannibal as he sets their plates down, more a press of their cheeks together than anything. He feels Hannibal lean into the motion, burying his nose in the collar of Will's forest green dress shirt, subtle enough that he barely notices but a familiar enough gesture that he's certain that Hannibal is taking in his scent.

"So, Hannibal, did you see Freddie Lounds' newest headline?" Bev tries to play it cool but Will can see the excitement in her eyes.

"Unless she released something else in the past few days I believe you are referring to the interview with the Chesapeake Ripper's captives?" Hannibal continues when Bev nods. "I have. It's a horrifying thing to consider, being kept alive so long after everyone you depended on gave up hope for your survival. But I can't help but find myself relieved for the reveal, if only because it will finally give Jack the evidence he wants to be certain of my innocence."

Molly pauses. "You were a suspect?" She stares down at her plate.

"Only because the Ripper was trying to implicate him for his own amusement. By this time today, Chilton should be getting comfy in his own facility while his trial is in the works." Bev's voice is thick with anger and she stabs her next bite of lamb with excessive force.

Molly shivers. "I would be so scared if I had been you, Hannibal. Being used as a plaything for a monster like that."

Will sends a knowing glance at Hannibal when their guests are distracted and Hannibal nods understandingly. He knows that Hannibal is well aware of how hurt he was when he was arrested but it doesn't hurt to remind him from time to time. He always makes it up to Will in the cleverest—and most pleasurable—ways.

"Chilton's slip-up allowed me to be here tonight, surrounded by good company. I can only hope that Miss Lass and Abigail are in a similar situation now that they're free from his influence."

The rest of the main course goes quickly, both of their guests, as well as Will, are too distracted by Hannibal's delicious cooking to do much talking. By the time Hannibal is collecting their plates to take to the kitchen, Will is fidgeting in his seat with anticipation, terrified that he somehow messed up their dessert and he'll have to deal with the texture of improperly formed creme brulée.

Hannibal returns with a flourish, a pleased gleam in his eye that he directs at Will alone. "I must say, Will, these turned out looking perfect." He turns his attention to his guests, settling in his seat and picking up the dessert spoon. "Will made creme brulée with a secret ingredient. He follows directions beautifully."

The wink Hannibal sends him nearly has him choking on the sip of water he took and Bev pats him on the back, more in support than to clear his airway. She cackles despite the minimal effort she puts into helping him. Even Molly snickers, though she's polite enough to hide behind her water glass as she does so.

"Yes, well Hannibal can be quite the handful," Will shoots back. Bev's laughing fit redoubles as Hannibal sends him a pleased look.

"I'm glad you think so, though you're more worthy of that title. Molly, did you know our dear Will here got himself framed by the Ripper while ill? He was so much of a bother in Chilton's care the man decided to kill again to get Will released." Hannibal grins as Will kicks him under the table, though it only makes him grin more honestly. Having his smile directed full force at him smothers the pinch of anger that welled up in him at the teasing.

"Don't listen to him, Molly," Will sends her his most people-pleasing smile. "The Ripper is too egotistical to know when to leave well enough alone. He missed the media attention so

much that he let me go."

It's Hannibal's turn to kick him under the table, though his attack is more subtle. It doesn't seem like Bev or Molly notice.

Bev whacks the burnt sugar until it cracks with a satisfying snap and takes a spoonful. Will finds himself incapable of looking away, anticipation bubbling under his skin almost uncomfortably. When she slips the bite past her lips and groans pleasedly at the taste, the bubble pops and giddy excitement flows through him. He wonders why it took him so long to intentionally feed his friends other people.

Molly hums, unknowing of the mental rearranging Will's going through. "Is it good? I'm a bit full, I'd hate to commit to eating something I didn't think I could finish." She looks genuinely disappointed as her blonde hair cascades around her face when she looks back down at the dish.

Bev takes a swig of her water when she finishes her bite. "Wow! It's pretty sweet but it has this nice savory streak, like when you make pancakes in the same pan you fried bacon in. What's the secret, Graham? Spill the beans!"

Will lifts his hands in a shrug. "A magician never reveals his secrets."

He lifts his spoon to crack the sugar shell and dig in, using the curls that slip into his eyes to block the way he watches as Molly does the same, seemingly convinced to try it.

Molly's eyes widen, then she squints in pleasure as she takes her first bite. She seems so pleased Will can't help but imagine a shaggy, golden retriever wagging its tail excitedly in her place.

Will finally gives the creme brulée a try. He groans, grabbing the ramekin and holding it to his chest as he shovels another bite in his mouth. The look Hannibal sends him lets him know that he disapproves, but is more amused than anything.

Bev smacks her lips obnoxiously after dramatically finishing off her dessert with a sigh. “If I think I had the money for it, I’d bribe you to make me meals like this every day, my own live-in chefs.”

“At your tiny apartment? There’s no space for my dogs. We would never agree.”

Molly lights up. “You have dogs?”

“Yup,” Will says, popping the p. “Seven strays so far, but I’m hoping to convince Hannibal to buy me a big, secluded mansion in the wilderness where I can spend the rest of my days as a stay-at-home dog dad.”

Despite Will’s cheeky grin and the fact that he has done no such thing nor does he plan to, Hannibal smiles besottedly at him. “No convincing required, darling. If you asked me to buy you a farmhouse in the French hills with a hundred acres of land for you to bring every stray you find and then some, I’d have the paperwork settled by the end of the week.”

Will flops his head into his arms, folded underneath him to hide his blush as Bev cackles at him. “You’re not doing that,” he grumbles.

“As you wish.”

Molly and Bev stay another half hour or so, and the four of them migrate to the study to have after-dinner drinks. Molly only has half a glass of wine since she’s the one driving them home, but the way Bev blushes at the word home lets Will know that she’s spending the night at Molly’s.

Will entertains Molly by talking about dogs while Bev drags Hannibal away to pick his brain on whatever case he’s consulting on with her. After a while, Molly starts rambling about how her first date with Bev went, how she was so nervous that she had nearly spilled her drink on her and Bev was so confident that she was convinced they would be a one-time thing.

She glances over her shoulder to stare at Bev with contended admiration in her eyes. Will smiles. “Bev’s real lucky she met you. She’s happy with work and she’s got some decent friends, but she has a big family that she doesn’t get to see often. She gets lonely, I think. Don’t tell her I told you that.”

Molly grins and presses a finger against her lips in a shushing motion. “My lips are sealed. She told me right away that she has no plans to have kids but that she likes them. She gets along well with Walter. I think he can see that she genuinely cares about how he does, not like some of the distant cousins that would pretend they knew what he was going through after his dad died.”

“Bev’s great like that. She’s a little weird, but who in our line of work isn’t? I mean, hell, Hannibal had me make creme brulée with bone marrow in it.”

Molly’s eyebrows raise. “I’ve never had bone marrow before. I think I was a little afraid of trying, honestly. I didn’t think it could so seamlessly be incorporated into something like this, that’s really cool.”

Arms wrap around Will’s waist just as a cool nose digs into his collar. “Will is a much better chef than he thinks, he just never let himself experiment before.”

Bev slings an arm around Molly’s shoulders, pulling her in to kiss the side of her head. “Hey, Molls, ‘s getting late. Do you wanna head out? We gotta make sure Walter isn’t staying up, he’s got that new game he was excited to play.”

Molly nods, eyes crinkling at Bev’s open snuggling. “Dinner was amazing! Thank you for having us. It was great to meet you, Will, Hannibal.”

They walk the two of them to the door, waving them off as they hop into Molly’s old van. As soon as the door clicks shut, Will tugs Hannibal down into a heated kiss. He tastes like the red wine he had sipped and the lingering flavor of the bone marrow.

Will pulls away to press kisses to his jawline. “No wonder you host so many dinner parties, it’s invigorating to watch someone unknowingly engage in cannibalism.”

“Nothing parallels the thrill I get from your mere presence, my love,” Hannibal pants. His hands grip Will’s shirt, unwilling to let them part. Will is more than understanding, his fingers tangling in Hannibal’s hair so tightly he’s probably pulling a few stands out.

Will lets the heat of their kissing slow until they’re more holding each other than anything. “D’you wanna call Abigail to see how they’re doing, then go to bed? I can hold you this time.”

Will feels Hannibal sigh, content. “Nothing sounds better.”

Abigail is cheery when she picks up. She tells them that she’s been accepted to a school she was excited about and that Miriam has been considering experimenting with less humanoid prosthetics.

“I think it would be cool, like those runners with the impact-limiting prosthetic legs that are just a curving piece of metal or something, I think if she got more comfortable with the fact that she’s missing an arm she can move on more, get settled finally.”

“The sentiment has some merit,” Hannibal agrees. “She might find closure in both the distance and coming to terms with her situation since that was denied to her previously.”

“Yeah,” Will drawls. “That Ripper sure did traumatize her. It’s a good thing someone’s got a tight leash on him now.”

Abigail snorts. “I’ll make sure to send a card for your birthdays. No return address, though, sorry. I’ve gotta go, I’ve got a job interview soon and I have to look professional. Say, Hannibal, which do you think works better: a suspender skirt and a bowtie or a pantsuit?”

Hannibal purses his lips in thought. “I suppose it depends on personal preference. Do you feel the job warrants a more sophisticated look?”

“It’s just a server position at this café within walking distance. I thought since it’s an interview it might be good to dress up a little more but I wasn’t sure. I never exactly got this kind of talk from my dad.”

Will cuts Hannibal off before he can provide his, admittedly well-intentioned, hopeless advice. “The, uh, suspender skirt is more than fine. You don’t wanna overdress. You might end up spooking your employers if you look too prissy.”

“You’ll do wonderfully, Abigail. Tell Miss Lass that we wish her the best,” Hannibal chimes in, pretending to glare when Will smacks his arm.

“Respectfully, I will not be doing that. It’s probably getting late for you so good night you guys. Try to keep the chaos to a minimum!”

Will clicks his tongue. "Now where's the fun in that? Be safe, alright."

Abigail murmurs a final goodbye before hanging up. Will stretches, twisting this way and that to hear his joints pop, grinning at Hannibal's bemused look.

The two of them stumble to the bedroom, taking turns to brush their teeth and get into pajamas. As he promised, Will is the big spoon, Hannibal's head buried in the crook of his neck as their legs tangle together.

"You'll help me get rid of Clark Ingram?" Will murmurs into his hair.

"Just say the word."

"You'd do anything for me."

They both know it isn't a question, but Hannibal hums in confirmation anyway.

"I'll figure out how I want him done away with soon."

"Soon," Hannibal murmurs sleepily.

Will listens to his breathing steady as his fingers keep note of the slow beat of his heart. He has a feeling that their affairs with Chilton aren't over yet, and Mason Verger has decided to make himself an issue, but he's certain that there's nothing the two of them couldn't handle together.

Chapter End Notes

Hello! Pardon the sudden disappearance :/ it was not intentional, but the 3rd quarter never went well for me in hs and that trend has continued into college a bit. I also spent a great deal of time fretting over how to write a proper ending, but I like how this turned out!
There will be a sequel, but I'm going to have it all written out before I start posting so it might be a while. Before then, I plan on finishing (and uploading) my transfem Hannibal T4T fic so if that tickles your fancy, keep your peepers peeled!
Thank you for sticking around and a double thanks to all of you who commented, I am so excited for the sequel! It'll have Will's plan for Clarke Ingram, Mason Verger's always anticipated, gruesome death, and Frederick Chilton's inability to die ;^)

End Notes

Been sitting on a BUNCH of Hannibal ideas for a suuuper long time, everything from a Hobbit AU with Marlana to Deaf Will and Hannibal. I have been into Hannibal a lot longer than most of my recent hyperfixations and watching everything Mads or Hugh has been in that I can get my grubby little hands on has not helped
Kudos and comments are adored! You can find me on tumblr as mateodoodle for all my Hannibal postings :3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!